25¢

June

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Good Stories Well Told

"Guns"
by Captain Willard K. Smith

"The Sap Rises"
by Richard Wilmer Rowan

"The Color of Crime"
by Elizabeth Corbett

That Grand and Glorious Feeling

comes to the editors of a magazine when they know to the marrow of their bones that, in writing an announcement of this sort, they can't be accused of any kind of exaggeration, because the stories they are announcing live up to almost anything that can be said of them. This is altogether true of the stories in

the July number of

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

And just to be specific about some of them, special mention is made of

"THE WEB AND THE NET"

By RICHARD WILMER ROWAN

"THE EMPTY SLEEVE"

By EVERETT SHINN

"THE MASTER OF SWORDS"

By BERYL SYMONDS

"THE BREAK"

By J. AINSWORTH MORGAN

All of these, each in its own field, are stories—plus. They are the kind of stories that would put an indelible stamp of approval upon any magazine. And they constitute less than half of the good stories well told to be found

in the July issue of

At Your Newsdealer's MYSTERY MAGAZINE *Price* 25*c*

ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume XI — Number 3

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Around the Corner

NCE upon a time a man wrote a book. It was a good book and many people read it and liked it. But many other people, while they liked most of the book, told the author what he should have done with certain parts of it to make it better. The "certain parts" that should have been written differently were rarely the same parts in any two instances, and when the author had made a kind of recapitulation of the many changes he had been advised to make in the book, he discovered that his own creation had disappeared and that, in its place, he had a jumbled conglomeration of ideas that meant nothing at all. So he decided it would be better to let the book stand as he had written it.

Lots of people tell us this is a very good magazine. Quite a number are good enough to say it is blazing a new and welcome trail of its own. And others, acting as undertakers extraordinary, hang crêpe upon our door, tell us what is the matter with us and with the magazine and advise us how to run it.

On a par with all normal humans we like praise. We like to be told that Mystery Magazine is paying little or no attention to established precedent in its field and is going ahead in its own way to its own success—whatever that may be according to the luck of the game.

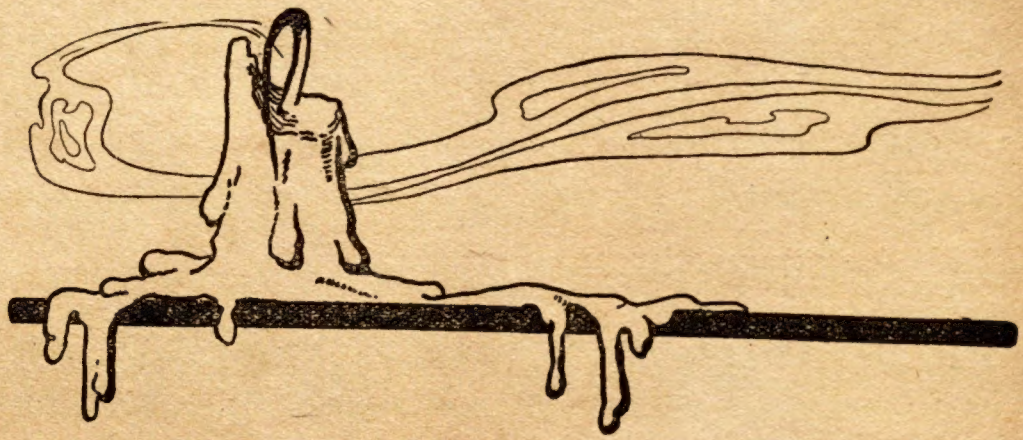
But this does not mean that we ignore the Grand Viziers of Gloom who tell us what will happen to the magazine if we don't do thus and so to make it different. We listen and we learn. And what we learn principally is that while approval is a harmonious thing. disapproval generally results in discord.

In other words, our critics approve in unison, and disapprove in a dozen different directions at once.

So we've just about decided, like the fellow who wrote the book, that until our unofficial advisers can agree among themselves, we'll go right along tending to our knitting in our own way.

What's your notion? We'd really like to know.

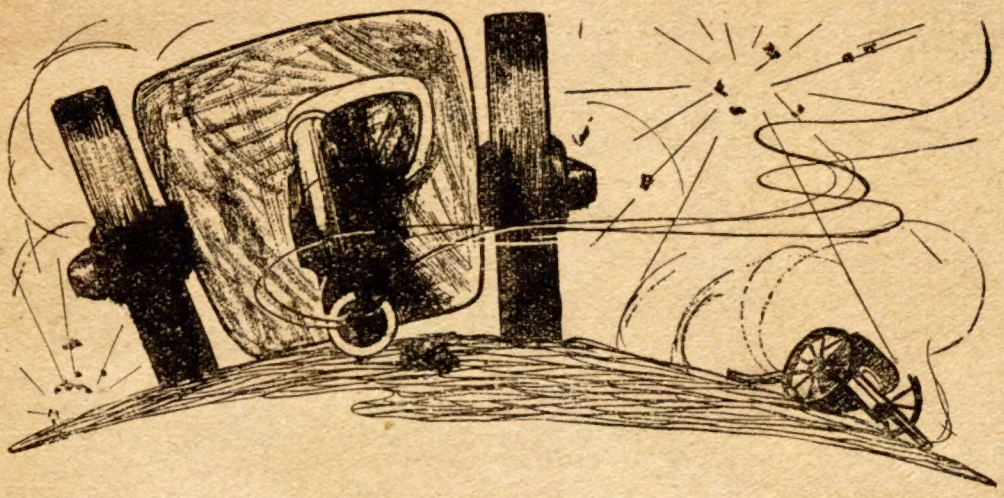
THE EDITOR.



Guns

By WILLARD K. SMITH

Another "Philadelphia" Smith Story



THE 168th Field Artillery cluttered up the high-ways and by-ways of Mehun-en-Bois with its guns and caissons. The regiment was "resting," cleaning and repairing its powder-pitted and copper-fouled guns after a three weeks arduous tour of the front.

Mehun, pronounced twenty different ways by the grimy gunners, varying from Muh which approximated the French, to Meehoon which gave it the best American pronunciation, lay fifteen kilometers back and seemed a calm Paradise in comparison to the former positions of the regiment.

Sergeant Philadelphia Smith, recently made "top kick" of Company C of the 168th, came out of the shell-wrecked house that served as the Regimental Sergeant Major's office, and cursed the situation he was confronted with.

His transfer to the artillery from the 18th Machine Gun Company, made a month before, had not worked out as happily as he had anticipated.

Philadelphia had originally been in the artillery, three years of it, and when his old regiment had been broken up, one half to form machine gun companies and the other to form the nucleus of the 168th, he had elected to go with the machine guns. But later, pining for his old companions in the artillery, he had, through the devious means that only regular army men know, effected a transfer back again.

Now he wondered if he would not have been better off with the machine guns.

"We've got a new skipper," Philadelphia told the second sergeant, "Another one. Captain Briggs has been transferred. He left without even a 'thank you' and after we worked our heads off for him. I wished I'd stayed back where I was. Maybe I can get transferred back again."

"Briggs wasn't so bad for a guy that'd been in the lumber business," was the reply. "What's the new skipper like?"

"Cripes, how should I know? I ain't any H. Q. card index. But he's a replacement. Never been up before and you know what kind of birds them is. Some lollypop college boy, you can bet your sweet life. Learned about guns back in training camp, and then comes up here trying to boss a he-man's outfit. I ain't been in this army for a year without knowin' what these here trainin' camp skippers is like."

"He couldn't be worse than that baby we had in Company A. For just pure——"

"Yeah, I know," interrupted Philadelphia, "you've told me all about that sucker before. I know it by heart."

"Well, you're top, and don't try to pass the buck down to us, if he don't know a breech block from a saddle strap."

"Cripes! It makes me sick the way these Sam Brownes get their bars. Three months settin' up exercises in some cushy trainin' school, practicin' with dummy guns and ridin' truck hosses, and then, whango, they steps up to the teacher and gets a kiss and two bars on their shoulders, and then we've got to show 'em how to handle a battery."

"When's he comin'?" asked the second.

"On his way, so rout them lazy grouches out and get 'em policed up so they can be knocked down to their new labor boss. And listen, if any guy makes funny remarks in line, kick him in the pants. We might be gettin', just by some good luck, a real army skipper. You know Company D got one last week —a hard-boiled guy that'd been in the army twenty years."

SERGEANT SMITH blew his whistle hard and long. The gunners, busy about the guns, gathered together in a rough formation, and the second sergeant gave them their orders to get cleaned up a bit and to be ready for an inspection by a new C. O.

Philadelphia repaired to the company H. Q. billet to properly bawl out the company clerk about his records. New skippers sometimes had a nasty way about them, and Mehun was a little too close to the front and Brigade Headquarters for even a top kick to tell a dumbbell Captain where to get off, should he inquire about bookkeeping.

The clerk was not in the shattered hut that served as an office, so Philadelphia, himself, was forced, with much grumbling about the efficiency of clerks, to take a look at the boxes of cards to see if they had been brought up to date. As he was engaged in this task, he heard the voice of a headquarters orderly.

"This is your company headquarters, sir," and he looked up to greet his new captain.

"Worse than I thought," was Philadelphia's inward comment as he came to attention and saluted.

Captain Anthony J. Wilkins would never have passed as a soldier except by the grace of his uniform. Of medium height, slightly stooped, carelessly dressed, and bespectacled with gold-rimmed glasses, which, set above a long nose and scraggly mustache, made him the very opposite of everything Philadelphia expected in a commanding officer.

"You the first sergeant of Company C?" the captain asked somewhat deferentially.

"Yessir, I'm Sergeant Smith."

"I am Captain Wilkins, your new commander, sergeant. Where are your guns?"

"This way, sir." Smith led the way out of the door and blew a short warning note on his whistle.

"Jumping Jehosophat," he thought as he directed the Captain to the guns, "just what I thought. Another one of them Boy's Brigade officers. I ought to be colonel if them's what gets to be captains. And with glasses, too."

THEY came up to the guns and the second sergeant's whistle called attention. The men jumped from their tasks and stood alongside of the guns, which had been placed close together at the side of the road and at right angles to it. The limbers were bunched behind them.

The captain, with Philadelphia at his left, passed by the men. Smith caught, in the corner of his eye, the second sergeant's smirk and wondered whether he was close enough to give him a backward kick as they passed. But no such luck. The captain turned and called jerkily, "At ease."

"Can't even give a command," thought Philadelphia, and the captain slipped another rung lower in his estimation.

"Tell the men to get back to work, sergeant," he commanded, "those guns are in bad shape."

"Yessir," he replied. "We have been up at the front for three weeks. Used up six thousand rounds." This explanation ought to have been sufficient, he thought.

"That isn't the way I want my guns to look," remarked the captain.

" 'My guns,' " Smith confided later to the second. "His guns, my gosh, and he hadn't seen 'em for more 'n ten seconds and we've been livin' with 'em, beddin' 'em down, massagin' their crummy backs, cleanin' 'em out and feedin' shells to 'em for six months. 'My guns,' he says, the poor sap!"

The new captain was a complete disappointment to the noncoms, and the cause of continued cursing on the part of the men. But he had this redeeming characteristic in Philadelphia's eyes: He cared nothing about records nor did he fuss about how the men slept or fed. All these details were left completely in the hands of the top sergeant.

But he was a bear on guns. They were cleaned and overhauled, scrubbed and oiled, polished and painted, and nothing approached satisfaction in the Captain's comments.

"We'll be put to polishin' shell cases next," grumbled a No. 1 man. "He's out here watchin' us ten hours a day and if we don't wear these tubes out rubbin' 'em down, I'll eat my shirt, cooties and all."

New oil was obtained for the recoil cylinders, which were taken apart under his expert direction, something never done in the history of the company.

The breech blocks were completely disassembled and put together. The bores were cleaned of copper until they shone like new steel.

"There's one thing this baby knows, though, sergeant," said the second to Philadelphia. "He knows guns and how to take 'em apart. Used to be an engineer in a gun plant, he let slip one day, and he's got a way of gettin' stuff for 'em too."

"Yeah, he slipped over to Company D one night and changed a breech with one of their guns and put it on our No. 1. If he thought the eagle on Pershing's hat was needed for one of 'em, he'd get it somehow. Look how he got that oil."

"He's sure nuts about guns. The hosses can look terrible. I don't believe he's looked at 'em more 'n once since he's been here. Even

got the jockeys workin' with waste and monkey wrench in the limbers."

A corporal joined the conversation. "I saw him out just before taps last night lookin' at the guns. Can you beat that? As if polishin' 'em made a lot of difference as to their shootin'."

"Maybe he was goin' to cut his initials with some hearts and arrers on the gun jacket," suggested the second. "He's got the looeys wonderin' too. Told one of 'em that if he didn't know more about guns than *him*, he'd join the sanitary corpse."

There was no question, after three or four days, that Captain Wilkins was a unique C. O.

Other commanders had been fussy about clean guns, but they had also taken an interest in the other details of the battery. One captain had been particularly anxious about the horses as well. To another, company recreation was a side issue, but none had worked them as hard as their present commander.

Where they slept, how and what they ate, whether they saluted or not, and whether they said "sir," made no difference.

But let one of them handle a spanner carelessly or drop a spring or nut on the ground and put it back without carefully cleaning it, and the captain let his presence be known. He trusted nothing to his lieutenants where the guns were concerned.

They looked after the horses, limbers and drill.

"I'm lookin' any night to see him try to take No. 2 gun to bed with him," said Philadelphia to the sergeant major.

"He's a funny duck," commented the latter. "Heard him talkin' to the major last night.

"Says he, 'Them guns is my children, major. I've got them better than when they were first made. I've been long enough gettin' up to the front and in command of a battery,' he says, 'and them guns fascinate me. Four beautiful babies they is, them seventy-fives.'

"I thought," continued the sergeant major, "he was goin' to cry over 'em."

"Some men is built that way," commented Smith. "Got a mechanical twist in 'em somewhere. Used to have a second sergeant who was always fussin' about the guns, just like this skipper. But he ain't no soldier, and they won't be no mournin' in this bunch if a Heinie bomb or sniper gets him one in the pants."

SO it went for five days. Captain Wilkins, tolerated, but not esteemed by his men, was oblivious to their comment. After the guns were cleaned to his grumbling satisfaction, men were put to work on limbers, and even caissons.

"Caissons, by cripe! Cleanin' them things up," Philadelphia spat disgustedly. "And we probably won't use 'em. Last time at the front they were a mile back and we toted every shell up to position three days before.

"He is the cuckooiest officer I ever heard of. What's that song the Frogs sing, 'Le chief de gare, it est cuckoo'? Well, that's this skipper we got. It gets on my nerves to even salute him. A fine soldier he is, with that mustache and glasses. How come he gets in the army wearin' glasses?"

The sergeant major, who listened daily to Philadelphia's tirades against his captain, responded, "I heard the major askin' him that. He said he learned the eye cards by heart and took off his glasses when they examined him. Could only see the top letter, but knew

the rest of 'em when he got that one and was rated twenty-twenty. After he got commissioned he put on his glasses again."

"He must have been damned anxious to get away from his wife or sumpin' if he had bum eyes as an excuse to keep out of the army, and then fixes the eye docs to get in."

The week's rest period ended and urgent orders were received for the regiment to move forward.

"Some rest we had," was a corporal's comment to the top. "I've got two more inches of biceps in my right arm from hard work on that No. 3 gun."

"Yeh?" was Philadelphia's none too interested reply. "Well, what you've been doin' is nothin' to what'll happen when he gets into the line and shootin'. We'll be wipin' down each gun and sprayin' its muzzle with an atomizer after every shot. I wish I'd stayed with my machine gun outfit."

Captain Wilkins left much of the responsibility of getting on the march to his lieutenants and noncommissioned officers. He oversaw the work, but was concerned only with seeing that his beloved seventy-fives were in perfect order.

"I'll say this, he don't butt in where he don't know," Philadelphia remarked to the third sergeant. "Where we goin'? You heard yet?"

"I heard headquarters sergeant say we was goin' clean into the Jerry's front line. Closer than we'd ever been."

"Sort of shock troops for the infantry, huh? Well, then, it's good-night. Better write home now and bid 'em all good-by. We was close enough last time. Cripes, our fuses was bein' notched at seven hundred yards once."

An artillery regiment on the march toward the front, along a narrow road at night, requires the highest directive skill. A Fifth Avenue traffic tie-up is as simple as first grade spelling in comparison.

Twenty-four guns, with limbers and caissons, four or six horses to a gun, require, with the attendant wagons, a mile of road.

The 168th was but a part of the troops moving into position. They left Mehun at twilight and were soon tied in with two divisions of infantry, together with three tank companies, an ammunition train, a field hospital, and all the rest of a major movement.

Three roads led to the flank where the infantry was to go into action, supported by the 168th and 169th Field Artillery. And but twelve hours were given for the flanking movement to get into position.

A surprise attack was to be made upon the German lines, and every possible precaution had been taken to prevent the enemy from knowledge of these fresh troops.

The movement of such a large number of troops generally extended over two days, but with forced marching it could be done, and had to be done, in less.

THE 168th, however, moved slowly. The infantry was in front of them, four regiments seeking their way almost blindly along the road. A company of tanks followed, and then the 168th.

They went forward in spurts, occasionally at a trot, then at a slow walk, and then a halt to wait till the congestion in front cleared.

Despite the most efficient planning and placing of guides, the columns were behind time. The infantry, which was to be in position by four o'clock in the morning, had still two regiments on the road at that time. A tank had gotten out of

control and rammed another tank, putting both temporarily out of commission.

This delayed the 168th until the tanks could be gotten off the road. Previous shelling of the highway the day before had left holes that had not been filled, and caused more delay.

The captains went forward for a consultation as to new orders, in case they were still on the road at dawn, when the German batteries could not help but find them.

The situation began to take on all the aspects of a serious disaster. Staff officers on horseback came hurtling by urging speed, where speed could not be had. The men became apprehensive.

"Cripes, we're up too close already," confided the second to Philadelphia. "That church back there's 'bout twelve kilometers from Mehun; that means we're within three kilometers of the Heinies, and we ain't turned off yet."

"Well, you said you heard we was goin' clear into their trenches, didn't you?" asked Smith. "It looks like it."

Midnight had long since passed. Three o'clock had found them at the church; at four they had gone but a kilometer or two further. The attack was to begin at six, when the artillery was to open with a fifteen minutes intensive barrage, and at six-fifteen the infantry was to leave its position and cross to take the German forward trenches.

At four-thirty the 168th had not yet turned off the road. It seemed impossible for them to get ready by six. And they crept closer and closer to the trenches. They passed a battalion of the 169th which had moved off to the side and was already in place.

"We've got advance position, Philly," said the second sergeant, running up to the head of the company. "Can we get in and ready?"

"God knows," he replied seriously, "I never saw anything go so bad as this march."

The column halted.

"Stopped again! They're goin' to make us livin' targets for the Jerries to shoot at. The grave diggers can just put one cross for the whole regiment in about another hour."

On either side the guns were firing occasionally, and the sporadic firing of machine and rifle sounded entirely too close for the artillery's comfort.

The attack had not yet started, but it was required that some activity be kept up both to avoid suspicion and to drown the vast subdued murmur that the movement of so much material and so many men caused. Ahead there was movement again and the word came down the line that the first two batteries had left the road to take positions.

The news brought a great sense of relief. The column moved forward and two more batteries moved to the left, leaving C and D Batteries on the road, as five-thirty came and passed.

Captain Wilkins came down and looked over the battery. He said nothing and to Philadelphia's question, "Looks like we're goin' to get caught on the way?" he returned no reply.

"Hell, he ain't got sense enough to know that it'll get daylight in 'bout thirty minutes and every Heinie battery within five miles will be shootin' at us."

They had passed over the top of a hill and stopped on the down slope, a position that seemed absolutely exposed, considering that they were less than five hundred yards from the front line trenches.

Around them they could sense the support troops resting and waiting

orders to move up at the first opening of the attack. It was no position for artillery.

Still they did not move. They waited apprehensively. The captain had gone forward to consult with the battery commander in front of them, and word was passed back that the two captains were in consultation with a staff officer and that there was some hitch in the plans.

They were not to take positions that had been prepared, and discussion was going on as to what to do —to retire or take a chance on finding a protected place along the line to the left. That maps were being consulted by the officers, was the gossip passed back to Sergeant Smith from the forward battery.

THE darkness began to lighten and the first sign of dawn appeared. Smith went down the line and cursed the men to silence, and cursed his commander for not taking the bit in his teeth and demanding protection for his men and guns. In this he did his captain an injustice, for Wilkins was doing exactly that thing.

"We've got to get off this road, colonel," he remonstrated to the Lieutenant colonel, who was directing their movements.

"I know it, Captain; don't get excited. But I've got to find a place for you. You're up here an hour and a half late——"

"But, Colonel, it wasn't——"

"I know, I'm not blaming you. It's unfortunate, but you can't go back, there's too much traffic coming on behind you. And you can't turn off here. The area on either side is so full of shell holes you'd bog every gun fifty yards from the road.

"You've got to go forward about two hundred yards, then take a cross road to the left. Company D will go to the right. It's exposed, but you can make it.

"A mile down there's a wood; dig in there. Shorten your range by a thousand yards. The barrage starts in about a minute. Troops will advance when it starts; we can't wait for any preparation. Get in position and fire on any enemy movement you see."

The colonel moved out of the way and the batteries came to life, first with sharp, quick orders and then the jangle of harness, wheels, pintle hooks, and the subdued shouts of the drivers.

Battery C had galvanized into action. The road was reasonably clear ahead of them and they went at a gallop. They turned into the side road at exactly six o'clock with the dawn already gray and the barrage starting.

On their flank came the roar of a hundred American cannon, sending flame and destruction across the sky to the German lines. The guns lay behind the top of the hill which extended before and behind them into a long ridge.

Philadelphia and his men could see the sky light up in red flashes and feel the reverberations of the explosions.

Below them on the enemy flank they could see the faint outlines of the American trenches, and a thousand yards beyond, the German positions were outlined in a lurid pattern of shells bursting above them. Stabs of flame flashed out amid the shell bursts as the enemy troops replied with rifle and machine gun.

Philadelphia Smith saw they were in a bad position. The road ran straight along the side of the hill about midway between the top and the American trenches at the bottom.

The slope was practically devoid of cover except for the thick woods

which lay a thousand or more yards in front of them, and whose protection they hoped to gain.

At the top of the ridge were support troops and below in the valley were the first, second and third waves of attack troops, moving out across No-man's Land toward the German lines, which lay up another slope, less steep and somewhat broken by ravines, patches of wood and the ruins of farmhouses.

Battery C clattered and clanked at a pell-mell pace. Not a man but felt the thrill of the situation. It was movie stuff to them, something that came but once or twice in a lifetime to artillery—a wild gallop across a moving front, in view of the enemy, with the universe a pandemonium of sound.

But the task of holding on or keeping up with the guns was too great for them to let their thoughts wander on the possible outcome. The horses needed no lashing from their riders for they, too, in some dumb way, realized the need for speed.

The road, which had been reasonably good at first, became full of shell holes so filled with water that there was no gauging of their depth. This slowed down the battery to almost a trot.

The sky grew lighter and shots from the German trenches began to go over them. A chance shell broke fifty yards in front of the leading limber, throwing the horses in wild confusion and slewing the gun around on the road.

Smith and a lieutenant straightened out the tangle and the battery moved forward again.

Infantry appeared on their flank and four huge tanks wallowed out of the mud alongside of them and blocked their path for a minute. The tanks were late, too. They should have preceded the attack, and they were now trying to catch up with it.

The tank gunners looked out of their slits at the battery in amazement, but made no pretence of holding their own advance to let the battery go by.

Filtering down from the support trenches and following the tanks came platoons of infantry, hurrying their approach to the front trenches.

As they saw the battery come careening across their front, the infantry stopped, unmindful of occasional shots falling about them, and cheered the gunners ironically.

"Lookit the artillery! What's it doin' up here?" Guns in front of the first line support troops and not more than two hundred yards in back of the front trenches was an unheard of thing to the doughboy.

"Hurrah! The artillery's earnin' its dollar today all right."

"Hell bent for Heaven them seventy-fives is."

"Where's the parade?"

The gunners, holding on, gave back chaff to the best of their ability, and swept on through the amazed troops, whose officers were forced to push the men forward, so intense was their interest in watching the unusual sight of artillery going into action alongside of of them.

The American barrage, breaking forth in such intensity, warned the Germans of an impending attack. It is possible they knew of it even before. Such things were not unknown in war.

Their artillery observers, quick to search the American front for indication of movement, gazed through their glasses at the slope of the hill and caught, dimly, the headlong flight of C Battery, and before the battery had reached the shelter of the woods, German shells began to

break near them. First two went over, then two were short.

"God! They're bracketing us," called Philadelphia. "Make the woods before they get the range."

It looked possible, till he saw ahead a huge crater where a howitzer shell had landed the day before.

The leading gun swung off to the side without slacking, hoping by its momentum to pull through the mud and reach the road again. It jumped, then lurched, throwing two men off, and then, as its wheels sank in the soft rain soaked earth, it stopped, despite the lashes and spurs of its riders, urging the teams to greater effort.

A caisson and the second gun tried the other side of the crater where the ground proved harder, and were just swinging back into the road when a shrapnel burst above them. The air was suddenly filled with rain of steel as two more shells burst.

Horses and men were struck down in a horrible, bloody jumble of harness and flesh. The following guns and caissons stopped short, the horses rearing high in the traces. Captain Wilkins, who was riding with the third gun, came up frantically.

"Go on! Go on!" he cried. "Take the left. Get through. Save the guns!"

PHILADELPHIA, with the first gun on the right side of the crater, had escaped the shrapnel. He left the gunners to struggle with the guns, under command of a lieutenant, and hurried back to the captain.

"Get on with the guns, sergeant!"

"They can't make it, sir," Smith replied. "You'll never get the horses by that mess up in front and you can't get around farther out, 'count of them other shell holes."

As he spoke the German shells reached the battery again, and caught the first gun still bemired at the side of the crater. Men and horses went down, and the cries of the wounded beasts and gunners could be heard above the noise of battle going on below them.

Wilkins rode forward, striking at the horses of the third gun to urge them forward, but another shell struck in the crater and its fragments hit the two leading horses of No. 3 gun, causing the utmost confusion among the remaining teams.

The German aim was sure and the gunners saw the hopelessness of trying to get through. With almost one accord the men on the carriages and caisson jumped off to seek shelter on the ground, away from the equipage.

The riders, left alone on the horses, struggled to direct the maddened teams, but they reared and twisted, pulling the harness apart and slewing the two remaining guns off the road into the mud. The riders jumped and sought safety.

Philadelphia and his captain called hopeless orders, which were lost in the roar of the shells and the shouting of the men.

"It's no use, sir," he expostulated to the captain. "We've got caught in a jam. If any of us is goin' to get out alive we've got to get out of the open."

"We can't leave the guns here. Get the men together and pull them by hand."

"By hand?" Philadelphia looked at his commander in amazement. "Who? Just me and you and the Louies?"

The captain cursed Smith and the men.

"Get them together. Get your men here!"

"But the orders are that when guns get bogged and under fire, the gunners can seek safety till the

Jerries let up. What's the use of the guns if you ain't got men to serve 'em?" asked Philadelphia.

"My orders go here," cried Wilkins. "You serve these guns right now."

"This guy's gone loco," thought Philadelphia, as he turned and ran to a group of men who were flat on the ground some distance away. Guns were just guns in his estimation, with lots more back in reserve, but a man's life was something different. It wasn't equipage that could be served out again.

And, deciding that his captain had not long for this world if he stayed with the guns, Smith gathered together such men as he could, picked up the wounded, and all started for the shelter of an abandoned farmhouse whose few remaining upright stones could be seen a hundred yards on their upper flank.

The German fire continued, but not so accurately as at first, although shrapnel still broke above the guns. The men from the leading pieces were dragging and carrying the wounded back to safety, but there was no hope for the horses, whose screams rang out above the din.

A high explosive shell struck beneath the bogged gun and threw it into the air. The gun came down, burying its muzzle deep in the mud, the carriage going off crazily in another direction.

Half way to the house, Philadelphia turned and saw Wilkins still on the road, seeking to detain three of the gunners who had been slow in leaving. They had lost part of their number in their delay and promptly told Wilkins to go to hell. They could do no more.

Gunners have stuck by their pieces until the last man had fallen, but those cases were in the face of an enemy advance, when the guns alone stood between an army and rout. Here was no instance of that kind, and the men felt the absolute foolishness of sticking where death only could result.

As Philadelphia looked, the captain was lost in the smoke of a nearby shellburst, and when it cleared he could not longer be seen.

"That crazy buzzard's been hit," called the sergeant to his men. "Served him right," he added, as he started back toward the guns he had left so abruptly.

"Where you goin'?" asked a corporal.

"Goin' back to see if the Jerries didn't kill him. Hope they did. Anybody want to go 'long?"

The men demurred.

"Don't you do it, serg; you're crazier than him. Ya can't make it. They ain't no medals goin' to do ya any good when yer dead."

Then they saw the captain's figure. He was bent over the trail-piece of one of the guns, struggling to pull the piece around so that it would face the German lines. He brought it about and began to work at the sight.

"What's he doin'? Goin' to try to fire it, the cuckoo guy he is," ejaculated the corporal.

Smith started back.

"I gotta go back. He's the C. O., drat him. Come, you guys."

But before the men could get started, another shell hit the battery, and when its smoke had cleared the captain was a khaki huddle on the ground. This decided the men against any attempt to go back. Philadelphia cursed them and ran back alone.

Crawling in and around shell holes and throwing himself flat at each burst, he reached the captain safely. He bent over him and noticed that no blood was visible. He

shook Wilkins, and the captain stirred opening his eyes.

"Work the guns, sergeant, or get them away."

"The Jerries got 'em already, cap. I want you. Orders just come from the general to leave the guns."

He picked up Wilkins.

"Where you hit, cap?"

"I don't know. I can't walk."

The sergeant hurriedly felt down the captain's body.

"You're shell-shocked. You'll get over it shortly, maybe. Come on, put your arm around my neck."

Wilkins lapsed into unconsciousness and Philadelphia made his way back, burdened with his inert form.

"I oughto get reduced for bringin' this guy back," he explained to his men as he reached the shelter of the farmhouse ruins. "When he come to out there, do ya know what he says? 'Get the guns, sergeant!' Can ya figure me doin' the strongman act, pickin' up a seventy-five on my shoulder with him on the other?"

"What a' we goin' to do now?" asked a gunner?

"Sit here and watch this battle," replied Smith, putting the captain down carefully on the ground. "I always wanted to see one, sittin' down and takin' it easy. I wish I had some breakfast, though."

"Yer'll not be so easy when the Heinies start shellin' this Rock of Ages, soon as they lengthen range a bit," commented the corporal.

"Maybe yer right," said Philadelphia. "Come on, let's get out o' this and down to them woods."

CARRYING their wounded, they made their way along the slope toward the trees. Below, the infantry had gone over and they could see the progress of the battle by the successive flashes and bursts of smoke from rifle, machine gun and shell.

Above, the top of the ridge was obscured in smoke, and all along it the explosion of German shells could be seen aimed at the American batteries which lay behind.

"Somethin's goin' wrong with this battle," Philadelpha remarked. "They oughtn't to be all that shootin' from the Jerries. And them infantry down there ain't keepin' up with the barrage by a long sight."

Something had gone wrong, but no one knew just what. The infantry had found the German lines twice as heavily manned as had been expected, with three times as many machine guns as intelligence had reported.

The troops had not advanced through the German trenches, but the barrage had and was a half mile or more beyond them, leaving not the demoralization that had been intended, but a heavy line of living German soldiers, hurt it was true, but still sufficient to stop the advance.

Of these things the gunners only guessed. They reached the wood and found a small field hospital already set up in it. The captain was turned over to the orderlies for treatment. He was found to be suffering largely from shock induced by the explosion of a shell almost at his feet, and his escape had been miraculous.

"You've got to hand it to that guy," said Smith to the second sergeant. "He sure had them guns on his mind."

"Yeh, look at 'em out there, After all the work we did on them."

The battle in the valley waged fiercely and the American artillery fire from the ridge waned as the German batteries concentrated their fire upon it.

"Them Heinies has got more guns

shootin' than we have," remarked the top. "That's darned funny. Somebody must have tipped this fight off to them in advance."

The woods were subjected to occasional shell fire, but the trees and dugouts afforded considerable protection. Philadelphia and his men served as runners and helped with the wounded, but Philadelphia was worried about the battle.

He wormed himself along a small ravine to the edge of the trees and looked out at the guns, endeavoring to concoct a plan to get them out of shell fire. The German batteries were seeing to it that the guns were not being manned.

"If I had a couple o' tanks now," thought Philadelphia, "I might pick 'em up by hookin' a tank to the trail." Then he saw stragglers begin coming back up the slope, dodging among shell holes as they painfully dragged their way back. This alarmed him a moment, and then he heard someone crawl up behind him and turned to find the second sergeant.

"The captain's gone!" the second cried. "He ain't there on the stretcher no more. One of the pill rollers said he saw him get up groggy-like and disappear in the trees."

"Well," returned Philadelphia, "I ain't wet-nursin' him no longer. He weighs too heavy for me to drag him around for another hundred yard dash."

"Wonder where he went. He'll be raisin' Cain with us for duckin', when he gets clear in the noodle again," replied the second sergeant.

"Yeh?" queried Smith. "Well, I'll take my lickin' alive, anyway. I'd rather give up these stripes and be doin' K. P. than be one of them lads out there waitin' for the grave diggers."

They discussed the battle and the fact that it was certainly going against the Americans. Suddenly Philadelphia turned.

"What's that noise?" he asked.

The noise of the battle came loud to their ears, but, closer at hand, was something different and familiar.

"It's an auto horn. What's it blowin' that way for? Hope to scare the Heinies with it?"

"You're right, Sarg. Look!"

From the edge of the woods, where the road emerged to run across the slope, they saw an ambulance leave the protection of the trees and go on a crazy zigzag course over and around shell holes, toward the guns.

"Where's that crazy driver goin' to?" asked Philadelphia. "They ain't no wounded out there no more."

They watched in amazement. At the forward gun it stopped and a man in uniform jumped out dragging a rope.

"It's the skipper!" cried Smith.

"He's swiped an ambulance and goin' to try to pull them things in," echoed the second sergeant.

They saw him drag the bodies of the horses and men aside and fasten the rope to the trail of a gun. A shell plunged into the earth a rod away and exploded, covering ambulance and officer with dirt.

"For the love of God!" exclaimed Philadelphia. "That guy's got guts. I'll take back everything I said about him." He looked around. A dozen men from the battery had crept up to look out onto the slope.

"Come, you guys," he yelled, getting up. "We goin' out there and help that four-eyed shrimp. If that shell-shocked trainin' school bozo can ride out there to pull them pieces off hisself we can go out and help him, even if every one of us goes to perdition doin' it. Come on,

make it pronto or take a beatin' from me."

PHILADELPHIA pushed his men forward. Some held back, seeing shells still landing near the guns. These he cursed and fought into movement. Eventually he led a dozen of them out across the slope.

They made the guns in safety. The captain, struggling by himself, looked up at their approach, but vouchsafed no surprise.

"Sergeant, get this gun in action. It's still serviceable and there's enough ammunition in the caissons. I'll look at the other guns."

"In action? Here?" gasped the sergeant.

"Look!" pointed the captain.

Philadelphia followed his arm. Below them in the valley the American advance had been stopped and flung back. An unexpected flank strength from the German trenches had enveloped the American advance where it had gone through, and the men had either to surrender or fight their way back.

Already they could see the broken lines of their own troops retreating across No-Man's Land and, in places, they could see one, two and even three waves of German infantry advancing through the Americans.

The support troops in the trenches below were firing, but it was evident that their strength was not sufficient to stop the counter-attack. From behind the ridge the American artillery could not get enough angle to the trajectory of their shells to place them among the German troops, and it seemed impossible for a gun to mount the ridge in face of the deadly artillery fire from a huge concentration of German batteries.

The American guns could only make a counter fire upon the enemy gun positions, and in this way hope to remedy the situation. An American airplane swooped low over the valley, raking the German troops with its machine gun, but suddenly it flung itself upward and then plunged headlong as its pilot was hit.

"We've got to stop that," said Wilkins.

"We and who else?" asked Philadelphia. "Two guns ain't a-goin' to help this mess much, but I'm with ya."

He gave hurried orders. The gun was dragged into position, as Wilkins went forward to examine the other three guns. They were cut and seared from the shell fire, but one could still be used. Wilkins called part of the men and gave them orders to man it.

Smith examined his gun. He opened the breach and closed it. "O. K.," he said to a gunner. "Gimme a shell."

They passed him one from the caisson. He flung it into the breach, closed the block and pulled the lanyard, calling out:

"I hope to heaven it's clear in the muzzle."

There was a roar, the tube came back on the recoils and sprang forward again.

"She's O. K. Come on, throw the stuff in her."

The gun sights had been destroyed, but they were not needed. Down in the valley, less than five hundred yards away, was his target, lines of gray men with queer helmets, advancing to the American trenches. It was practically blank range.

Never before had the battery seen its target and aimed at it directly, with fuses notched practically at their lowest range. Probably not once before in the whole war had an American gun pointer sighted

directly upon advancing German troops.

Philadelphia glanced along the barrel and pulled the lanyard again. The shell burst beyond the Germans.

"Try rangin' 'em for point-blank," he called to a gunner. "And pray they don't go off 'fore they come out. I ain't countin' on bein' knocked off by my own gun."

The men dragged a caisson up close. They worked feverishly, passing shell after shell to the men at the gun.

The roar of explosions, the noise of the recoil and clatter of the breech lock became almost a continuous sound. Four shells a minute, then five, six, seven, eight, nine! Ten!

Philadelphia Smith kept the muzzle aimed at the German advance, depressing or traversing it as his target varied. The shrapnel burst squarely in front of the advancing enemy. Occasionally shots went through without exploding, or buried themselves in the ground ahead, but the rapidity of the fire made up for errors.

The second gun was now in action, doing deadly work. The German lines hesitated, and broke up in places against this point blank artillery fire, supported now by increasing fire from the American trenches where the infantry, catching new hope from the artillery support, held their ground.

"It's workin' like a machine gun," exclaimed Philadelphia enthusiastically. "Never saw a seventy-five work sweeter. Wow! That one stopped 'em. Come on, make it quicker. Oh, what a gun! That new oil did the trick. The cap knew what he was doin' all right. Whango! There's another old girl. Cripes, she works sweet. Boys, that cleanin' did the trick."

Captain Wilkins left the other gun and came over to Smith and his men.

"Take off your blouses," he called, and stripped off his own. "Give 'em here." He took the coats and carried them to a nearby shell hole filled with water and soaked them in it. Then he came back, muddy and dripping.

"Wrap these around the gun. It'll be red hot in a minute at that rate of fire." He helped them tie the wet coats.

"Get a bucket, one of you. Keep 'em wet." A man hastened to obey.

"We're breakin' all records for fire, Cap," yelled Philadelphia above the roar. "Must of fired forty in the last five minutes. Bango! Look at that one. Some guns. Better'n machine guns!"

There was a roar alongside of them, punctuated by screams. Philadelphia ducked a rain of dirt and débris and glanced sidewise. Where the second gun had been was but a smoking, gaping hole. A direct hit had wiped out all trace of the second gun and its men.

"God," he thought, "we're next." But he kept at work, sighting and firing. Another shell hit the ambulance and smashed it to splinters, one of which struck a man at the caisson and ripped his side open.

The gray lines of attackers down the valley were demoralized. Where confidence had been supreme, there was now fear and faltering, except on one flank where the German advance had almost reached the trenches.

Wilkins pointed it out to his sergeant.

"Slew the trail around and get them or they'll break through."

They jumped to the trail and traversed the gun. From the ridge behind came a burst of fire as other

batteries joined in. A shrapnel whistled above them and burst.

Philadelphia and the captain dropped down, but two more men were caught and doubled up—masses of bleeding flesh and torn cloth. Smith looked up—the captain, himself and two men were left.

"Keep them cloths wet," Smith called to one of them. "She's awful hot, Cap; she won't stand much more, and neither can we."

Wilkins examined the gun while the sergeant fired.

"It's all right. I know these guns. It's all in keeping them in good condition. Keep it going."

Philadelphia, excited to a high pitch, heard the calm voice of Wilkins, and looked at him in amazement. The captain was covered with mud and dirt. Blood was caked on his forehead and one hand was bleeding from where it had been caught in the recoil mechanism. But he had the calm of a professor in a class-room, demonstrating the proof of the theory that guns kept in proper condition would give superior service.

The loss of men had not disturbed his calm and the enemy shell fire had apparently not penetrated his consciousness. His detachment from the details of the battle and his concentration of keeping the gun going were a marvel to Smith, who suddenly grew cold with the thought that his captain would alone survive this ordeal. That he was some kind of a superman, protected by that luck, or whatever it might be, that made such men heroes.

The sergeant felt sure the next German shell would put him, Philadelphia, out of the fight. There were but four of the original battery left, the captain, the top, a man at the caisson, and the loader.

At least fifty bodies were in sight along the road and around the guns. There were others in shell holes. And there would be three more before the captain would retreat, if he did even then, but as long as the captain stayed, Philadelphia felt he must remain at the gun helping him.

"HE'LL get the D. S. C. for this and I'll get bumped off," thought Philadelphia, as he automatically kept the gun working. "There won't be enough of me left to put a cross over."

He depressed the muzzle to take in the last visible group of German troops and pulled the lanyard. The firing pin snapped, but there was no explosion. He turned to the loader.

"There ain't no more shells," the man replied. "I told ya, but ya didn't pay no attention."

Wilkins turned from his job of pouring water over the barrel.

"Keep on. Keep on. We've stopped them and she'll still fire some more."

"What ya goin' to keep on with?" asked Philadelphia, suddenly conscious that he was dead tired, almost incapable of movement. "Spit at 'em?"

Wilkins ignored the sarcasm.

"Drag up that other caisson from down the road," he ordered.

The sergeant turned reluctantly to contemplate a task that he felt was impossible to perform, but he was saved the effort of trying.

A burst of shells from the German batteries landed among the remnants of the guns. One struck the caisson and the explosion broke it to splinters. The shells it contained detonated and richochetted in crazy fashion all around them.

A powder case took the loader full in the chest and knocked him back over the trail into a crumpled heap.

The spoke of a wheel trans-

fixed the body of the man at the empty caisson and he fell screaming.

Smith threw himself backward and escaped the explosion, but another shell burst in front and knocked him sideways into a shell hole. As he fell he saw the captain bending over, his hands before his eyes.

"It's all over," thought Philadelphia, "but his fool guns stopped 'em, I guess."

HOURS later, it seemed in his fancy, he crawled out from the muck, uninjured but stiff and sore. He came up to the top of the crater and looked over cautiously.

Down in the valley there was a great burst of firing, and he could see American troops swarming across to the German lines. The enemy artillery fire was slower and was concentrated lower down.

He looked at the gun. It had been thrown on its side, but was apparently still intact. Captain Wilkins was struggling to right it. The slope was alive with reinforcement troops and, making their way in zigzag fashion toward the battery, was a group of staff officers.

Philadelphia got up on his feet. He was covered with slime from head to foot, his face even smeared completely with it, but if there were any congratulations or medals to be had, he was determined to be on hand. The officers were approaching, unseen by Wilkins. Sergeant Smith called to him:

"Cap—Captain, they's some staff officers comin'."

Wilkins turned and saw his sergeant, but did not glance at the others.

"Here, sergeant," he called, "ge busy with your men and clean thi gun up. We may need it som more."

Philadelphia looked down at hi own battered, grimy figure and laughed.

"Clean that thing up? Well, skipper, I hands it to you for nerve And I hopes ya gets your ches caved in from carryin' medals. You and yer guns stopped the Heinies all right, but from this second on I resign from bein' top sergeant and chief manicurist of them seventy-fives. I demote myself to be kitchen police and K. P.'s don't do no gun polishin', 'cordin' to rules. You talk to the general comin' there, I'm goin' down to the woods and peel potatoes."

He saluted and, turning with an attempt at military smartness, limped away.

One of the staff officers stopped him.

"You commander of those guns?"

Philadelphia was without blouse, hat or anything that would indicate his rank. He saluted and replied wearily:

"No, sir, but there's a crazy guy out there who is. I'm a K. P. and a machine gunner on the side. I'm goin' to draw two hundred rations and feed the battery. Both of us. Then I'm goin' back to my machine gun outfit."

And he continued his way toward the woods, where ration wagons were arriving.

The Luck of Angus McFortune

By H. MORTIMER BATTEN

SO far as the sole survivor could make out, the vessel had broken clean in two when she came down upon the reef.

Anyway, she had sunk like a broken bottle, and her deck cargo of suffering humanity had cascaded amidships into the sea.

There had followed much shouting and the hissing of steam, but these sounds had faded into the night of fog, and the sole survivor found himself alone on a deck raft, which had somehow cleared the rigging and the wireless. How he had got there he did not know, but at any rate it did not matter.

He was alone, but no—not quite. There were two others with him, and he remembered dragging them from the sea, having searched in vain for more valuable live stock. It was just in accordance with his luck that he, of them all, had struck a safe sea deck.

Luck! Angus McFortune had always boasted of his luck, and today it dogged his steps with its usual persistency.

For the moment, he was busy applying artificial respiration to one of the other two—drying her out with his neck cloth, which, strange to say, was quite dry, though the rest of his clothing was saturated.

Also, his hair and his mustache were dry, so he could not have been under water higher than the shoulders. That, of course, was in accordance with his luck—not a single mouthful of brine had he imbibed!

They were a strange trio, the red-haired seaman, the big black cat, and the big white rabbit. It was the rab-

bit Angus McFortune was bringing round. He had pulled her from the sea, where she was floating, belly upward. At first he thought she was dead, but now, slowly, surely, she was coming round.

His other raft mate, the big black cat, had been the skipper's omen of luck. Well, the luck certainly had deserted the skipper, but it had transfered itself to Angus McFortune. He had no fears for the future.

A heavy swell was running, and the driving fog was impenetrable for more than fifty feet. The raft, with her light cargo, rode like a cork. At one end of her was a seatight case, and having restored the doe rabbit, Angus McFortune went forward and unscrewed the hinged lid.

Inside were a number of cork life savers, a rope, a drum of water, a large box of biscuits, some Hudson Bay blankets, a bottle of matches, a bottle of quinine and several cans of emergency ration.

Luck, if you like, but Angus cursed himself for not thinking before of the life belts! It was too late now, but—well, he might as well give someone the benefit of the doubt.

The tide was running at several knots, and for two or three minutes the red-haired seaman amused himself by hurling the life savers out into the fog, distributing them impartially. Some poor devil might be glad of one.

A minute or so later, however, Angus changed his mind on this point, for he saw something which put the stopper on any idea of life savers. It was a pointed dorsal fin, idly cutting the surface a few feet from the raft.

It was growing darker every minute, and clearly there was not much object in sitting up, so Angus got out the blankets, made them fast with the rope, and prepared to sleep.

He tucked the rabbit in behind his back, and the cat tucked herself in in against his chest, and each of them was quite satisfied with the present order.

But Angus could not sleep because a dull heaviness in his head, and because he kept on thinking that he could hear human voices, about and around him.

Once he must have dozed off, for he thought he saw the top rigging of a sunken vessel gliding by at astonishing speed, and, clinging to the rigging, one of his shipmates.

He leaped up, disturbing the cat and startling the rabbit, but only to find the blackness of night around and the hiss of the fog and the sea. Never before had the sea seemed so immense and ominous and lonely to his sailor mind.

For a time Angus lay looking at the blackness, then he saw something—really saw something which made him realize that there is one thing worse than being alone. It is—not being sure that one is alone!

At first he felt something grating under the raft, and he strained his eyes and his ears and his nostrils for any sign of land. The grating ceased, and alongside the raft he saw—the Thing!

It was a shark, he supposed, but it was luminous, phosphorescent. He could see its whole trailing, straggling outline, as it rose to the top; then it sank slowly down into the blackness, till it looked like a streak of ghostly vapor.

Angus McFortune laughed boisterously to keep his nerves together. Thereafter he could see luminous sharks everywhere, whether or not his eyes were open. The whole air was full of them.

MORNING came at length, and a gull overhead brought welcome relief. It wheeled round a time or two, then alighted on the end of the raft, and presently went to sleep. So Angus McFortune stalked it and wrung its neck; then he cut it up and gave the cat her ration, replacing the balance in the sea-tight box.

The rabbit seemed sick—too much salt water probably. She lay prostrate on her side, and refused to take any interest in life. Angus tried to feed her on scraps of dry biscuit, thinking that it would absorb the salt water, but she would not look at it. Then he remembered the fresh water in the box and gave her some from the drinking cup. She drank long and eagerly, as a horse drinks, then she ate some of the biscuit and began to hop about the raft.

Judging from the behavior of the gull, there was no land near as yet, and when a little while later the fog momentarily lifted, there was none to be seen. Angus sang songs, then he amused himself playing with the cat—his omen of luck.

But the luck took an abrupt turn, at any rate so far as the cat was concerned. Augus was lying flat on the raft, his chin on his hands, and the cat was opposite him, dabbing at his nose and his mouth as he pulled grimaces.

Suddenly she flattened, clutching the deck, and, only just in time, Angus grabbed her head. There was a lunge and a swerve in the water, and, well—the omen of luck was tail-less!

This taught both Angus and the cat a lesson, for evidently she had allowed her tail tip to overhang the edge. Something had seen it twitching, and had taken it, as a trout takes a fly. So the cat spent the remainder of the day nursing the stump and glowering vindictively at the besieging waters.

That night Angus McFortune could not rid himself of the notion that a dead man was climbing out of the sea on to the end of the raft.

Several times he saw the man distinctly; a big fellow, wearing a voluminous black shirt and a red rag round his white neck. Then the darkness would close, so that Angus could not even see the end of the raft, and three times he had to get up and grope over to assure himself that the man was not there.

He could not understand it, because he had never been a nervous man, and such hallucinations were not in accordance with his usual run of luck.

At daybreak, Angus again fed his animals by hand, carefully and systematically. Pussy was still fretting about her tail, but it did not seem to affect her general health. Later, the rabbit suddenly contracted suicidal mania. She erected her ears and hopped straight across the raft, falling with a flop into the sea. Angus risked his life fishing her out, and told her severely that if she did it again she could dern well drown.

But she did do it again immediately she was free of his hands, and again he fished her out. This time he untwisted a length of the rope and tied her up amidships.

He concluded that her conduct was due to the fact that she was shortly to become a mother rabbit for, perhaps, the twentieth time. Evidently she was not satisfied with the raft and was anxious to find a suitable nest for her forthcoming brood.

When, next, Angus looked round, he saw a veritable flotilla of dorsal fins, large and small, moving and stationary, on every side. A gull screamed overhead, then another

and another, and in a minute the air was full of gulls.

Angus sniffed, and a shout of joy broke from his lips. Land? Yes, land!

He could smell it, he could feel it, and he went over and cuddled the black cat which had brought him luck.

But there was no current here, no wind, only the oily swell, and for three hours the raft lay motionless in the fog, while Angus strained his eyes till they hurt. He argued with himself, and almost came to blows with himself.

Had he scented land, or was it another derned hallucination? No, he could scent it now—the smell of wet earth and of wet grass—but was it receding?

Anyway, why didn't they bump? Why were there no indications of tide? The suspense was maddening, till at length it dawned upon Angus that they were in dead calm water. Thousands of gulls now filled the air, thousands of little fishes all round broke the surface into a ripple.

TWENTY minutes later, the raft grounded on a dead smooth, sandy beach and Angus McFortune went cautiously ashore.

Under one arm he carried the cat, and under the other the rabbit. He had made the rope fast to the raft and was paying out line as he went —partly because he feared quicksands, primarily because he wished to moor the raft above the tide line.

Beyond the sands the shore rose sharply and, mounting, the red-haired seaman found himself in a clear atmosphere.

Ahead was a narrow strip of rolling sandhills, and beyond that what looked like a swamp in the hollow of the landscape, and beyond the swamp, three miles or so away, a rugged hill rose for perhaps eig hundred feet.

On either side of the strip ther appeared to be sea, but Angu argued that, according to his luc some kind of mainland would l behind the hill, with, possibly, hu man habitation.

The swamp might prove brackis but with a hill that size, thera should be a fresh water sprin somewhere. That was his first co cern, and he set off hopefully t ward the swamp.

As he went, he was surprised find the earth honeycombed wi burrows—burrows which looke like those of rabbits, interspers with smaller ones, made by roden of some kind, possibly lemmings.

Here the ground was firmer, an under the coating of sand was bed of sterile red-clay soil, an every few paces it fell throug under the man's feet, so that h sank to the knees, owing to th honeycombing.

Yet, most mysterious of all, not rodent could he see, and their hab tations bore no indication of havin been used for a long, long time. I parts, the great warrens had falle in, and the surface of the eart was broken and filled with san pools.

Pondering over these peculiar ties, Angus did not at first notic that he had struck what must hav been a road—a human road, a car track.

On his left it wound back to th coast, but ahead it went on till i dipped out of sight into the swamp The wheel tracks were filled wit sand, but there were no indication of a horse having been used. Men evidently, had pulled the cart, and many months, perhaps years, had passed since the vehicle came tha way.

Angus followed the trail, an

soon he found himself crossing the swamp by a dry ridge which bore every resemblance to having at least received human assistance in its creation. Here there were birds, many birds—birds he knew, squatting about the pools—knots, redshanks, snipe, dunlin, curlews, golden plovers, and a host of others, all so absurdly tame that the man's hopes rose.

No immediate danger of starvation, but of course these birds might be passing migrants. He tested the stagnant water; yes, as he had expected, it was brackish. But, since human life had once existed here, there was no reason why he should not exist, till a vessel picked him up.

Some time later he reached the foot of the hill, and because dusk was near and the road went winding round its base, he left the road in order to examine the lay of the land from the summit of the hill.

He found a green patch, and he tethered his white rabbit in the middle of it, leaving her to eat her fill, because he was tired of carrying her.

Then he toiled up the slope, still carrying the black cat, because his sailor mind bade him do so. And as he went, he told himself repeatedly that this was an island. When he got to the top he saw that it was.

At the foot of the opposite slope was the sea, not a mile away, and from where Angus now stood he could see the sea all round.

There was precious little on that island, save the swamp and the hill and the sand dunes, all perforated with lifeless burrows, possibly five square miles in all. But if there was fresh water, that was quite enough for any adaptable unmarried man.

When Angus got back to the place where he had left his rabbit, he found that she had slipped her collar and had made a nest in the only available cover—a nest of sand grass and fluff from her own body. So he left her to her own devices, for he knew enough about rabbits to realize he could do no good by interfering.

Darkness was near now, and Angus was in two minds whether to follow the road or whether to go back to the raft and camp near to his breakfast.

Somehow the idea of following the road, in the gathering darkness, to an unknown destination did not appeal to his better judgment, so he went back across the swamp. On the way, the cat clearly indicated her desire to be put down among the birds, so he let her go and he watched her stalk a golden plover with consummate ease.

She brought it back to him, and he tucked it into his pocket, encouraging her to go for another, which she did—a knot, this time. This one he allowed her to eat, but the plover he took with him for his own supper.

Uncommonly good it was, too, roasted on a spit, and accompanied by his emergency ration of biscuits.

Luck! Angus laughed aloud when he thought of his luck. He only wished that his shipmates were there so that he could tell them.

Yet somehow, as night settled, that lifeless island, with its unknown history of departed men, filled him with a sense of dread. What really had happened there? Life of many kinds there had been, but now there was no life, save for the birds which came by the air and belonged to other places.

Still, he dismissed his fears and, warm and dry, he settled down for the night, the cat beside him as before.

When, later, he awoke, to realize with relief that he was no longer on the sea, the cat was gone. He called for her for a time, but when she did not come, he fell asleep again, and next he was wakened by the cat mewing and dabbing at his nose with her forepaw.

Daylight was very near at hand, and he found her sitting by his face with another golden plover for breakfast.

So Angus ate the plover, then, having bottled some water and stuffed his pockets with biscuits, he set out on his second voyage of exploration. He had armed himself with a shillalah of seaweed root, and this time the cat followed as a dog follows, till they reached the point at the hill foot which they had reached last night.

Here Angus took up his omen of luck and went on slowly, for again that strange foreboding of the unknown was upon him.

ON his right lay the broken hillside, piled up with boulders of all sizes, interspersed by water-washed beds of sand. The more Angus looked at it the more the feeling grew upon him that those boulders were not just as nature had placed them.

There was a suggestion of the human agency—a suggestion that here and there the rocks had been piled into breastworks and terraces and barricades, camouflaged to resemble the natural hill face.

Once, indeed, he noticed a great cairn of stones, which looked as though it might have served as a watch tower. Possibly his imagination was running away with him, but all this was not more improbable than the unmistakable cart track which he trod.

Presently Angus McFortune distinguished a sound which caused him first to wonder whether his ears, too, were playing him false, but as he went on it became unmistakable—the twittering of a vast army of small birds.

He thought that above the rest he could hear the full-voiced notes of some kind of lark, and he was certain of the bustling, discordant clamor of starlings.

Then the trail took a sudden turn round a rocky outcrop and there directly ahead, was an alcove, obviously man-made, and, rising from the level, a crude castle, built into the hill face, exactly resembling it till one took a second look.

Then one saw the man-built walls, out-cropping the natural slope, with terraces and stone steps and cairns and outlook posts and indications that men had burrowed in the soil. But a bygone generation of men, as it was a bygone generation of rodents which had honeycombed and undermined the island from end to end.

At the base of the primitive stronghold, not sixty yards away, was gathered the multitude of small birds whose twittering Angus had heard. They sat about the rocks and on the earth, warbling and chattering, and the whole place was alive with them.

Nor did it take long to find out what had attracted them there, for at the foot of the hill, alongside a flight of tipsy stone steps, was a huge timber trough, built shipbuilder fashion.

It was covered with moss and festooned with ferns, and water gurgled into it from a broken earthenware pipe, overflowing all round so that a swampy patch surrounded the trough.

Water? Yes, fresh water, and the birds were there to drink.

But as Angus stared, he noticed something strange in the way they

drank. They did not pursue the obvious course of alighting on the brink, but they drank as swallows drink—that is, a-wing, as though they were afraid to alight.

Dozens at a time were hovering over the surface of the trough and one, then another, would dip, casting up a little silver cascade, then fly away as though scared by its own boldness.

Fresh water? Yes. That meant that Angus could live, and he pushed on eagerly to test the spring.

But, thirty feet from it, the cat uttered a yowl of terror and began to struggle frantically to get away from him, using its claws with an effect which made Angus curse.

Instinctively he stepped back, soothing the animal, for—had it seen something he could not see? If not, why was it so afraid of the place? His sailor mind was filled with a new and deadly suspicion.

For a time Angus waited and watched, then again he went quietly up, and again the behavior of the cat warned him to turn back. This time, in its paroxysm of terror, the animal actually freed itself and scampered back forty paces, bristling and growling, and Angus scampered after it, fearful that his luck might turn.

He seated himself on a dry spot overlooking the trough and watched. All morning he watched, and he saw thousands of small birds drink a-wing, but absolutely nothing happened to break the seeming peace of the rugged buttresses.

So, he was about to approach from another point, when a curlew appeared and, somewhat timorously, alighted on the trail near to him. The bird looked storm-ruffled, as though it had come a great distance, and obviously it was eager to drink, though afraid of its strange surroundings.

Presently, however, summing up its nerve, it flew uncertainly to the trough and alighted at the edge, plunging its long curved beak into the water and drinking thirstily.

Then something unaccountable happened, and in an instant the air became full of fluttering wings and wild cries of alarm. It was over so quickly that Angus could not quite decide what had happened.

Then he realized that a head had darted from the stonework and struck the curlew as it drank.

Yes, he could see the head, dragging its quarry back into the darkness of a crevice in the stonework above the trough, and so far as he could make out the creature was a huge snake.

That, then, was why the small birds had drunk a-wing, and that was why the cat had warned him not to approach.

Angus was no coward, and now that he knew definitely what he was up against, his fears left him.

"Well," he muttered, "if yon's the only one of its kind, I guess we'll soon get quit of him!"

He made a detour, climbing the rock face to a point forty feet or so above the trough, then, taking up a huge stone, he threw it into the water, where it fell with a splash and a resounding "thug."

Instantly the head of the reptile darted from the cranny, the curlew still held between its jaw. Angus hurled another stone, hoping to strike it, but he missed by inches, and then, to his horror, the cunning brute turned its head and looked up at him with its expressionless, stony stare.

The black cat turned with a caterwaul of terror and scrambled down and out of sight, and, as it did so, the creature, with a sluggish motion, the swiftness of which de-

ceived the eye, began to emerge—to coil up and over the rocks toward Angus.

It was not a pleasant moment, but the sailor rose to the occasion. Stone after stone he hurled, but his powers of judgment seemed to have left him.

He missed the snake by feet rather than by inches, and the full length of the brute was now in view—sixteen feet of blotched and mottled venom, which looked like a poisonous vine.

It paid no heed to the fusillade of stones which struck and burst on either side, and half the intervening space was covered ere it dropped the curlew and uttered an evil hiss as it came on toward the man.

ANGUS had his back to the rocks. Retreat he could not, and to try to climb down would be suicidal. He must stand where he was, and now he recalled his shillalah of seaweed. He flung its heavy end over his shoulder and stood there ready to strike. A skilled golfer was Angus McFortune when ashore, and he was not likely to miss his stroke.

The sinister head came up, up, till it reared above the level of the shelf at his very feet. Then Angus stepped back and delivered a blow which would have stunned a rhinoceros.

Something had to go, either his wrist or the snake or the shillalah of seaweed, which was tough as leather and almost as heavy as lead. Something had to go, but Angus timed his blow accurately and well, and next moment he felt a shower over his face and his arms.

The weapon was torn from his grip, and the monster fell, writhing, lashing, encircling the rocks and falling again, till it landed with a thud on the wet earth, its head almost severed from its body.

"That's learnt him a lesson, anyway!" muttered Angus McFortune, dashing the sweat from his eyes. Then he sat down to recover his breath.

He wondered if there were any more of the same breed about, and for half an hour he hurled stones at the battlements, but nothing stirred save the birds.

So at length he went down, took up his cat and recovered the remains of his shillalah.

Up the disordered steps Angus climbed, while his omen of luck raised no objection. He gained the first terrace, and certainly no human feet had trodden it for a long, long time.

Everything was covered with moss, and peering over the crude battlements, he observed something which he had not noticed hitherto. It was a level green patch away to the right—a patch of perhaps a quarter of an acre in extent, and dotted all over it in even array were a number of small cairns of stones.

Yes, it looked like a human burial ground. What else, indeed, could it be? True, there were no epitaphs, no crosses, simply the little cairns of man-laid stones, and the nearest cairn was very small, and the earth over what had apparently been the grave had been roughly restored, as though the grave digger had found his task almost too much for him.

Doors opened from the hillside on to the terrace, and there were windows which had been covered with parchment, only a mouldy fragment of which remained here and there.

Angus went to the nearest door, which stood ajar. It was solidly constructed, as though by a ship's

joiner, and the hinges, roughly beaten out as a blacksmith would beat them, appeared to be made of brass.

It swung open to his touch without a creak, and inside the little room were the frameworks of what had been human beds, with sackcloth as mattresses and sand grass as bedding.

The mattresses were a mass of holes, gnawed by rodents, and the sand grass was a litter of chaff, and now Angus saw that the floor was littered with small white skeletons. Rats! The remains of a plague of rats—remains which, sheltered from the weather behind the closed door, were still perfect and intact.

Angus was about to leave the sinister place when again he noticed those hinges, and a sudden thought occurred to him. He took his knife and scraped the surface of one of them. It was soft, and beneath the weather-dull surface was a color which there was no mistaking.

The hinges were of rough, impure gold!

Bit by bit the air was clearing, but, strangely enough, Angus did not realize the magnitude of his find. He automatically put it down to his luck and to the black cat. He had, of course, expected something of this kind, and nothing at that moment would have surprised him, nothing would unduly have excited him.

He went on to the second chamber and the third, then up another flight of steps to the next terrace, exploring each nook as he came to it.

Here the water which fed the trough had worn away its man-prescribed path, and ran at random everywhere. He saw a series of wooden boxes placed one below another, and from one to the next of which the water had once gushed in a series of little falls. He knew that this had been a launder—a gold-washing sluice.

Also, there was a huge furnace room dug into the hill face, but Angus did not explore its recesses, it looked so black and shadowy. Snakes might live there, or something even worse.

He went on from room to room, and, at first, each was much like the last, till in one he found implements—crowbars, picks, spades, sieves, each of which had woodwork about it gnawed by the rats.

Another room had been the cookhouse, for there was a long table and the cooking utensils, and the range and cauldron.

Anon, he found what had been the store-room, full of empty sacks, now for the most part dust, while the very boxes on the floor were gnawed to splinters for any taste of food they might have carried.

Finally he came to a door which was locked, and his instincts told him that behind that door lay something worth while. So he went back to the tool room and got a heavy crowbar. With this he jabbed and levered and banged, till the massive portal yielded, and inside the room was what he expected—gold bullion!

It was stacked up about the floor in orderly squares, and occupied half the floor space. In one corner was a great pile of yellow dust, much as a miller might leave his yellow grain, and at the sight of it Angus McFortune uttered a whoop.

But, somehow, the sound of his own voice startled him. He had not had time as yet to think what all this meant.

But the stone steps still led on and up, from this terrace to the next, though much narrower now.

So he went up, and the steps led him to a single door, which was closed.

In front of this door was a small terrace with battlements. Evidently it was the look-out tower of the lot, for it commanded a view of the sea on all four sides. This was the last door.

If Angus was to find anything to shed light upon the mystery, he would surely find it here. He fought with the latch, and finally it yielded.

Very cautiously he pushed the door open, and it opened silently like the first. Beyond was a small chamber, perhaps eight feet by nine feet, and leaning against the opposite wall, fantastically illuminated by a ray of sunlight which fell through the half open door, sat what had been a man.

One of the skeleton hands held a quill pen, and on the floor, nearby, was a little black bottle, uncorked, which had once contained ink.

But what arrested Angus's gaze was a sheet of foolscap tacked to the wall above the remains of that sole occupant. On the sheet something was written in an unsteady but educated hand. Angus went up and read the screed. It ran:

"Written by the sole survivor of this enterprise. Briefly our history is this:

This island is a little Klondyke. We discovered it ten years ago, and brought rabbits here to provide an emergency ration. But they became too numerous and began to die in such thousands that we could not cope with them. We caught tons in pits, and carried them to the sea.

"Then our skipper brought the snakes which, he said, were nature's remedy for the rabbits. That was not our experience, because the snakes seemed to prefer cannibalism. They ate each other, and are still eating each other, and soon there will be only one surviving snake . . . the one big enough and best able to eat the rest."

Angus paused a moment . . . then he read on:

"We should have quit before we got out the first three ship-loads, but we were too greedy, and just five years ago today our steamer piled herself up on the north reef, sinking with all on board.

"She was an old boat and full of rats. We saw her go to bits, and we saw the rats swim ashore in an army. So we became marooned, and we have waited since for a vessel.

"No vessel has appeared, but the rats have increased beyond all belief. They have annihilated the rabbits, and since then life has become impossible for us and for them. They have eaten us out, and we cannot fight them. Moreover, they have contracted some ghastly disease, and our men have got it one by one.

"Now I am the sole survivor, and I have shut myself in here, the only rat-proof building that remains.

"A month from now there will be no rats left, but that does not matter because there will be none of us left. There are forty of us, and whoever finds this accursed island is welcome to it. This place is a hell-pit!"

ANGUS pondered, dimly conscious that he had read in those plain statements what was one of the most terrible histories ever penned by human hand. He went out of the dingy chamber, for the air seemed suddenly to have become stifling.

On the terrace he mastered himself, and stood stroking his cat.

His luck! Yes, this was his luck, but what did it mean? Marooned on this island with all its horrible associations, to wait, and yet to wait?

Angus went down again to the chamber where the bullion and the heap of raw gold-dust lay. Better to get it out in the open, he thought where it could be handled more easily when the day came to take it away.

For more than two hours he toiled in the heat of the stuffy room. At the end of that time he had, bit by bit, staggering under the weight, carried several armfuls of the golden metal and the golden grain out onto the terrace.

Then he sat down upon it to mop his brow. The cat had been indifferent. She was perched on a rock, her head tilted back while her green eyes followed the flight of the gulls, dipping and wheeling in front of the cliff. She had begun to act as if her role of mascot was ended. But when Angus McFortune sat down, she clambered up again on his knee.

Mechanically his arm went round her black sides and his thoughts strayed to the things that all this gold would buy him in Glasgow . . . a fortune all his own, and he such a sensible spender!

"What luck," said Angus, "what luck! I've got everything I want in the world . . . "

Gleefully he squeezed the cat, as he had squeezed her many times since they had landed together. But this time she wheeled on him with a vicious meow and scratched his hand.

This brought his pleasant thoughts up with a round turn. It was getting dark . . . he was hungry . . . where in God's name was this island anyhow?

Suddenly he discovered himself . . . the whole round world away from Glasgow . . . sitting on his gold, hugging his cat . . . while below him lay his speck of barren ground, with, all around it, the empty, endless sea.

The First Soothsayer

Melampus was the first mortal endowed with prophetic powers. Before his house stood an oak tree containing a nest of serpents. The old serpents were killed by the servants, but Melampus took care of the younger ones and fed them carefully.

One day, when he was asleep under the oak, the serpents licked his ears with their tongues. On awaking he was astonished to find that he now understood the language of the birds and creeping things. This knowledge enabled him to foretell events, and he became a renowned soothsayer.

At one time his enemies took him captive and kept him strictly imprisoned. Melampus, in the silence of the night, heard the woodworms in the timbers talking together, and found out by what they said that the timbers were nearly eaten through and the roof would soon fall in.

He told his captors and demanded to be released. They heeded his warning and escaped destruction when the roof finally did cave in. For this they rewarded Melampus generously and held him in high honor forever after.

Nothing Ever Happens to Angel!

by EVADNE PRICE

Mary had a Little Lamb

The fourth of a series of short stories, each complete in itself.

A GIRL rarely gets no encouragement to make a spot of money honest. At least I don't. Whenever I've tried to do same, Fate has stepped in sudden, grabbed my gross capital with an airy gesture, pocketed the doings, and done a graceful exit through Centre Opening, eyelashes sweeping cheeks modest, and slight form shaking with suppressed mirth.

It isn't no good me being honest. Time and again I've had a shot at the Honesty-Is-the-Best-Policy stuff and missed the bull's-eye every time.

No girl *likes* to be a gold-digger, she'd much rather owe her success in life to her busyness ability than her cleverness to stuff some hard-boiled admirer up with a good sob story, which don't bear no fruit once in ten times, but what's she to do?

She's got to live, hasn't she? And if Fate won't lend a guiding hand! Honesty may be the best policy, but like most insurants dittoes, it's apt to be too well spoke of by them what never tries it.

If I've one fault it is I'm too quick on the uptake. Girls what are over-bright from the Griddle of Venus upward generally makes their errer. I'm what they call an Oppertuneist, which is nothing to do with singing, although I thought that, too, when first I heard the name.

An Oppertuneist is a lady what is itching to take a chance guaranteed to bring in a good fat check with no risk whatever. But, like most things in life, the Oppertuneist stunt is overrated. It's only in paper back shockers the lily-white heroine puts her spare banknote into a dud gold mine and coins a million over the week-end and saves her aged pa from ruin.

I suppose I'd better spill the Best time Story, which we will entitle

"Mary Had a Little Lamb."
Now, Chicks. . . .

may of been the hot climate of rcelona, but the bags under my shing orbs was simply shocking. looked as though a new face uld be a good idea if it was fted on quick.

Old age is creeping on with a hell a leap, I decides anxious, taking close-up of my worn dial in the tel mirror. It was then I discov- ed, horrifyed, that the texture of y skin ain't so good, neither, and ially I decides on a soupsong of ce massage to restore the jaded sews, which they needed.

Either that or to be soled and eled by the nearest bootmaker.

So an hour later I finds myself the Gerandez Saloon of Beauty he sign is in three languiges and u can take your pick), and after erandez has examined my face and oaned holler, took a handful of y hair and had to be revived by a awling assistant, dug his forefin- r into my larynx and clutched s heart fervent, and all the other rmalities as practiced by all the est beauty merchants, I finds my- lf lying back eventually coated ith dark-green mud and looking n appetizing dream of Eastern de- ght and daintyness, disgised like the Demon King in the Pantomine.

My old ma wouldn't of recognized e. Then Ferandez left me to dry r twenty minutes with my eyes ut while his famous desert mud id its dark and dirty work on said aded tissews.

The Saloon was curtained off into ttle alcoves with chintz hangings, nd you couldn't see who was in he next compart, of course, and I was laying there bussy with my houghts, when suddenly I heard wo females spouting English. Vell, you don't hear much of that spoke in Spain outside the theatre dressing-room, and although one of the voices off-stage was American, I come all over queer and registered the usuall Home-Sweet-Home emo- shon, and would possibly of shed a simple tear for my blameless girl- hood in the old vicarage, only for fear of spoiling the beauty treat- ment which I was treating myself to, so I come to earth quick, and decided to quell my feelings.

I just laid there luxuryous listen- ing to the murmer, hardly harking to what words they was using in the diskussion, when all at once I sit up and takes nourishment.

"Why, it's a certain fortune for practically nothing," says No. 1.

"Hush, oh, hush!" s h o o s h e s America; "someone may overhear."

"No jolly fear. Who understands English here?" says England, so the second voice resooms:

"You spoke a mouthful when you said the word fortune. It's the most collosal peace of good luck that I stumbled across Mrs. Miller, for she and she alone possesses the receipt that will transform a wrinkled old hag into a girl of seventeen in twenty-four hours!

"An extraordinary face lotion! Imagine it. There's five million dol- lars in it for the shareholders. Any woman will pay almost anything to be made young and beautifull."

I takes a syrruptitious peek at my green dial in the glass, and I think of the charges of that highway rob- ber Ferandez and I agrees silent she's enunciated a true bill.

"Painless! No cost of produck- tion! A common Spanish weed what grows wild and requires no cultivashion. Mixed with a small chemicle compound, and there you are. A fortune!"

"And do you know the name of the weed and the formuler?"

"No, I don't." No. 2 laughs bit-

ter. "A fortune within my grasp and I'm held up for a paltry seven hundred and fifty dollars—that's a hundred and fifty pounds English money. She wants the money in English, does Mrs. Miller.

"The lady I referr to has lived in Spain for years, and she's got a room at the pension I'm staying at, and I've been kind to her. Talk about casting bread upon the waters! Well, mine has come back in banknotes.

"The poor thing has been ill—still is ill, and her gratitude to me is pathettick. Last night she thought she was dying, and she told me her secret, how years ago she nursed a Spanish peasant woman threw fever, and in gratitude the woman passed over the formuler the Andeloosian peasants guard so jeallously that preserves their schoolgirl complections and makes them like flappers when they're old, old women.

"And this Englishwoman is in sore need, dying perhaps, a stranger in a strange land, and she'll sell the formuler cheap. Oh, it's like taking candy from a baby. And the cruel part is I can't raise a paltry hundred and fifty pounds.

"That's why I telephoned you to meet me here, to diskuss your going in on the deal. I thought this would be the best place, because everyone speaks Spanish and we wouldn't be overheard. If anyone got wise to this we'd be double-crossed. Oh, my cruel, cruel luck at missing the chance of a lifetime."

She sobs subdued and bitter and I tremble with excitement, for I see, too, what a chance of a lifetime it is. It's the most romantick thing I've ever heard of. It reminds me of the advertisement on the back of the monthly magazines when you send the free coupon to be turned into a sylph overnight by the unselfish woman what only wants to help all plain dames and as monetery reward.

Only *this* is the real goods. America's right, women will with their last bean to look l Ain't I the Awfull Example a time of going to press?

I come all over queer, not Satan has yet to be told ste obey the traffick cop's signals keep behind me, me only being ous so far, and the germ to the formuler for my very ow having yet attacked me.

"What's this Mrs. Miller's ress?" asks England casual, I squirm under the Nile mud nearly pass out in a swoon, though I want America to spill bit of informe worse than a tecktive on his first case trying t cate the body near the old m house, yet I'm scared to deat she's too chatty England will round to Mrs. Miller's abode of and pinch that formuler be Ferandez returns and scrapes mud off my pores, leaving the fresh and clear underneath lik newborn babe's, vide adverts.

But America is wise to her terfuje, thank heaven, and I bre free again as she says repro ful:

"Ah, no. First I want your w of honnor that you'll give me a share in the profits for the n Your spoke word is enough for An Englishwoman's word is castle," she declames heroic, a think:

"Shut your trap, you village id and cut out the patriotick dope carry on with the good work.

Which she does, begging the ot to go halves on her terms, finally England says, "Righty I'll get the money by tomorrow. a go."

"Saved! Saved!" gushes other hysterical. "It's the cha

a lifetime; you won't regret it, ney. The address of Mrs. Miller 13 Casa da Pasa," and she spells slow, and I reached cautious for pencil and writes it down.

Not that I'd got no defernite idea en of twisting it over on the la-es, and if Ferandez had come in en and there I might of laughed rnful and forgot it all, but he s delayed, and as I lolled there lpless and caked I begun to think rious.

RST, my wasted life over-elmed me. What had I done th same? Nothing. I'd led a meless and poverty-struck ca-r save for touching a few althy gentlemen friends what d plenty, and God knows that s harder than pulling teeth.

The way wealthy men hang onto ir wealth is an object lesson to y oyster on "How to Lock Up the mily Pearls Tight."

A girl with a good honest heart e me is a failure finanshially in s world. Since ever I could re-mber I'd had it put acrost me rth, south, east and west by low isters. And here was an Opper-neity to put one over on someone r a change and make a few odd ppers to provide against old age, hich, judging by my appearants is p. m., wasn't so far off.

It's dishonest, there's no disgis-g the fact, but then so is all ance. Didn't a dame I know once ffle a diamond ring at a shilling time and get fifty people in for it, d I won it, and on trying to pawn me the gent behind the counter id it was a good joke and was ere a chorus to the refrain?

And was I going to turn down a ppertuneity for the sake of a spot dishonesty? Besides, wasn't I lping a poor fellow countrywoman what was ill and dying from poverty in a forein land?

And after I'd looked at it like that it seemed I'd been sent by Providents to help poor Mrs. Miller and get a share in the magic face lotion, which I ought to be able to wangle for anything under 75 pounds, which was my gross cappital in the bank at the moment. Yes, I'd try a spot of dishonesty for a change, honesty having had a innings for more years than I care to remember, and proved itself a No. 1 hall-marked washout.

I hardly look at my dial when Ferandez returns, after all, I'm going to have a skin like a girl of 17 in a day or two, so I should worry. All I can think of by now is the Andeloosian peasant's receipt that Mrs. Miller has in her summer sale at a astounding reducktion.

I'm so trembly and excited that I nearly sweep out without paying, not that there's much chance with a Shylock like that Ferandez leaning elegant near the door and toying careless with the cash register.

I apologise, but I see he don't beleive it was a over-sight on my part, and I thinks scornfull "Wait till you got to go on your bent knees to me, my lad, begging me to sell you a few bottles of Spanish weed, which I'll swaller neat befour I'll oblige you" and I shakes the dust of the Saloon off my feet, which there was plenty of to shake, as I pointed out to him haughty and aloof.

I will pass light over my visit to the bank where I drew out my entire fortune in case I needed it. I nearly barged into 2 of our chorus ladys what tried to lure me into a cafe by undignifyed whoops and signs across the square. They was laughing fit to kill theirselves over some joke they had on, but I pretended not to see them and jumped into a taxi and at 5 o'clock exact I finds myself at 13 Casa da Pasa, half choked with

excitement as I peel the bell. It's a pension and smells like it, too.

Yes, the Seenora Miller lives there, says the servant with a face that looks like something the cat's brought in and regretted a second later. Will the Seenorita wait? Yes, the Seenorita will.

I tell you I stood on that doorstep for fifteen minutes nearly gassed by the drains and not notising it, I was that worked up, and my heart fairly leaped out of its socket when I was informed that the Seenora would see me. I clutched my handbag firm and entered, trying not to appear as decomposed as I felt.

MRS. MILLER was lying on a bed with the blinds down, but even in that light I could see she was nearly ready to start performing a single act on the harp. I felt awfull, I can tell you, and like robbing the grave, but Cupid had got me in his love of money, and I gathered currage when she asked me in a horse whisper what I wanted.

Well, the truth's always got a nasty cold sound to me, and no born lady of refinement likes to admit she's been straining her earpieces to listen in on a private line, so I hum's and ha's a soupsong, and she just lays there and watches me with eyes like two glass blue beads, and I tell you I feel like a cheap varyiety of half-drownded jelly-fish, the speecies that even kids chuck back into the sea when they've hooked them accidental.

I come out all over in a persperation with nerves, and I nearly beat it back home p. d. q. There's an awkward silents, and final I breathes hard and speak brusk and out.

"I've come about a certain scrap of paper," I blurts. She half rises herself, emetts a shreik and falls back literary foaming at the jaws, and I nearly join her and make a duet of the fit, I'm that shock. Her hands clutch at the bedclo and I think "Oh hell, the poor bird's going to take a quick fl heaven and I'll get blamed."

But no, she recovers gradual I passes her a double Vichy w and she calms down, but she wat me furtive and garded, and spirrits begin to rise, for I see on the right track of the formu

"Busyness is my middle na Mrs. Miller," I says bold. "Yo got a certain beauty receipt. want to sell it for 150 pounds. I'm willing to take a quarter s for 37 pounds 10, or I'll——"

She interrupts me fierce. "I w sell, I won't," she moans. "All life I've resisted the temtation barter my honner for a mess potage. Besides, there isn't suc paper as you mention."

"Tell it to auntie Jane," I soot "You can trust me, ma, beleive I'm only a poor working girl wants to turn a honest penny."

"One application to your alone would be well worth four t the money you offer," she murm dreamy. I give her a quick pishious glance, but she looks innercent I decide to ignore rudery implyed, seeing she's ad ted she's got the secret, and I her again to let me have a qua share, but she shakes her h dubyus.

"No," is her anser. "Mrs. Hoop, the American lady below, promised her the first refusal."

I goes bersick at this. A fortun sight and stopped at the post f mere scrupple, as I used to rem as the adventuress in "A Face F Bride," a play I was on the roa once. I pleads with the old d but she is addamant. The addamant she becomes the keener I get to go in on the d

"Would you," I says at

buld you rather a American got s chance than a fellow English-man? Think of the white clifts of ver before you say no."

She starts violent at this and ries her face and a sob shakes her the foundations. "England, my gland," she crys, "how long since t I seen your white clifts," or rds to that effect, not that I've r seen them alledged white clifts Dover personally, always making eeline for the lady's cabin hasty case of accidents when I cross the annell, but knowing the menshion them affeckts some people senti-ntal—so I throws in a referents the Union Jack and The British pire upon whom the sun never s, and her emoshion grows and I see she's melting as I'd hoped.

"And," I concludes dramatick, ink of the Statue of Liberty and perbishion and compare the two intrys!"

I pause for insperation and wish new more of the country built by . C. Culumbus and chopped down Mr. Geo. Washington, but befour an put any more strain on my nk box she throws up her arms th a gesture.

"Call in Mrs. Van Hoop," she s, "I will try and make her see son," and she rings the bell.

Well, you would of thought Mrs. n Hoop was waiting in the wings her cue to make her star en-nts in the big scene, for she sered the bell personal with a en book in her hand. When she nped me she clutched her bossom, ich she'd plenty of to clutch.

I took a dislike to her from the st second, and I knew her fur had se too. At the first close-up of her l I understood why she was so on secureing the world rights of e Andeloosian peasant's magic face ion. She needed it bad.

"Honey," she remarks affecktion-ate to Mrs. Miller, then turns to glare at me suspishious. Being a big busyness dame, she sees instinktive what my game is.

"Mrs. Van Hoop," begins Mrs. Miller, "this young lady has a prop-osition to make."

She stops and I says my line Re a certain scrap of paper.

The Van Hoop drops the book she's nursing and screams and turns on me like a tiger what's seen red meat for the first time for months.

"There's no scrap of paper," she howls. "Is there, honey?"

Mrs. Miller hesitates and looks at me and gives me a flick of the eye-lashes. "She's like my little daughter that died," she says pityfull to Mrs. Van Hoop.

"You can't break your word," re-torts that flint-hearted gargoyle, what a blind man could see had no heart. "Tell her there's no such paper."

Mrs. Miller sighs timid and avoids my glance. "If there is it's worth-less." Eviddent she's scared to death of Mrs. America.

"There, it's worthless, worthless!" crys the latter in a loud voice. "Now go," and she holds the door open.

I looks at Mrs. Miller what seems to gain courage instant. "Mrs. Van Hoop," she says sharp, "you go too far. I can't allow this desplay of ill manners. This young lady, what is so like my little dead Lily, come here with the best intenshions—"

"Yes, to cheat me out of a for-tune," interrupts Mrs. Van Hoop bit-ter.

"I thought you said the paper was worthless," I breaks in with a cruel smile.

Well, I had her there, although she's such a smarty, and I can see some of the pep wilting visible and I follow up my advantage quick and suggests we get down to brass tacks. I tell her of my 37 pounds 10 what

I'm willing to take a quarter share with.

"Nothing doing," she says. "I've managed to raise the 150 pounds myself," and she takes out a bundle of notes and my heart falls plonk.

"Hand over the formuler, Mrs. Miller," she says, "here's your money."

I catch Mrs. Miller's eye despairing and again I feels a wave of symperthy coming from her orb to me.

"Mrs. Van Hoop," she announces sitting up strait, "I've changed my mind. I want another hundred for the formuler, that's 250 pounds. I been selling too cheap, I see. Also, I want a share in the profits. Would you be willing for that, young woman?"

"I would," I rejoins quick. I've took a dislike worser than ever to the Van Hoop freak and I feel I'd give my sole to dish in her deal, and it would of been cheaper for me if I'd confined myself to that portion of my annatomy.

She refuses to consider my paltry 37 pounds 10 at all, so final I turn to Mrs. Miller and confess I've got 75 pounds on me, all I possess in the wide world. It's eviddent she's took a liking to me because of her dead and gone Lily what she referrs to every minute now.

But the American is game, for she shrugs her shoulders and trys to smile, though it's a pityfull effort and would of scared a healthy baby into convulshions. It made me shuder. I've never seen a gargoyle smiling before, and it ain't a pretty sight, beleive me or not.

"I'm beat," she admitts. "I've got 175 pounds in the world, all I can lay my hands on. I'm obliged to take your offer of 75 pounds, miserable as it is, me to have a half share, and you and Mrs. Miller a quarter share each. Is that agreed?"

I hesitate a minute, after all my last bit of money, but I de it's worth the risk, because t isn't none.

Mrs. Miller takes my hand pats it encouraging. "The arra ment suits me," she whispers, "b she looks sharp at Mrs. Van H "this young lady will mind the muler until such time as we a to put it on the market, which be as soon as I recover," and parkers up a faded yellow enve containing a old dockument wri Spanish and faling to bits with ness, but which I can't read knowing the dialeck.

"Why should *she* mind it?" mands Mrs. Van Hoop.

"She's my countrywoman," ret Mrs. Miller terse, "and she's like little dead Lily. Them's my te Mrs. Van Hoop, take them or l them."

And though it's obvious Mrs. Hoop is as wild as a cat with a hot fishook in its ear, she bows the unevitable. In silents she wr a agreement which we all signs the landlady as witness, she ha over her 175 pounds and I count my 75 pounds and the formule mine.

WELL, I tell you I arrived at theatre that eve in a mellow dre When Ponto, my dog, bit me I patted his head and said he wa naughty, playfull little pup, I that happy. Who wouldn't be on verge of making a fortune?

Already I'd writ to a wealthy An ican gent, Mr. Antony, him w married her what used to be bossom pal, Gaby, but what I'd p ed from recent through a misun standing.

I knew Gaby would let her hu finnance me if I give her a applickation and made her look a girl of 17.

Yes, my path was roses, roses all way from now on, as the poet s. Already I could see myself in suit at the Ritz, London, and a a on the Rivera, with a Rolls- yce at my beck and call and a nch maid.

"To my astonishment the dressing- m is in a uproar. Chorus ladys is ng about laughing fit to bust their es, and the port is flowing like ter. "What's the dirt?" I enquire ious, it being unusual to see such arity at the back of the stage and rt wine on a Thursday night.

And eventual my pal, Glory Morn- , between gasps, tells me the glad ings. She tried to tell me this ernoon, she says, when they hol- ved to me and I jumped in a taxi. s a joke on our leading lady, len Bell, what puts far too much ll in the Helen to be popular with humble choristers.

Helen, it appears, is suffering m shock, she's at home with two tors, she's been robbed for 175 unds by two confidence trick peo- e and has nervous prosteration. Well, I can tell you I fairly fell out and doubled up with joy. It s the best I'd heard for years. I screamed till the eyeblack got in y eyes and my ribs ached. If Helen s unpopular with the rest of the rls, she was Mrs. Napolean to my rs. Welington since the night she t me fined a full night's money r coughing in the wings.

After I'd recovered from the first ld spasm of joyous deliruim, I beg r details with tears streaming wn, and Glory recites the rest of r peace. "Two women in a shoe op yesterday, a American and a nglishwoman, they was sitting next or to Helen and was whispering out a wonderful face lotion, a panish weed. . . .

"A Spanish weed . . ." I murmurs unned, and sudden the point of the joke on Helen Bell seems a bit flat. As in a nightmare I hear Glory repeat what is, alass, only too familair to me, for it's my own downfall in full detail, even to Mrs. Miller's dead daughter Lily, what Helen is the image of too. And as she's a brunette and I'm a blond. . . . The adress is different, it's in the Calle Cortes instead of the Casa Da Pasa, otherwise . . .

"So Helen she parkers up 175 pounds. Fancy a wide-awake dame like Helen falling like that for that confidents stuff, and this morning she took the formuler to a chemist, and what do you think it was?"

She pawses for effect and I asks what mechanicle. My brain is seething like a mill-pond, and spots is floating before my eyes. It's something terrible the way I feel——

"What?" I repeats dull, reaching for the port bottle and wishing it was arsenick.

"The magic lotion formuler was the Spanish Alpherbet writ in crooked chareckters on old vellim," shreiks Glory, having a fresh attack of girlish laughter, in which I joins hilarious, doing a bit of acting which might of given Sarah Bernhard a few points.

Only over my dead body I decides hasty, will my loving comrades know I've been done good and proper the same as my ennemy, Helen Bell.

I jests and makes merry though I feel I'll die long before tomorrow, when I can call at 13 Casa Da Pasa on Mrs. Van Hoop and her fellow gargoyle, Mrs. Miller, and try to get my money back.

Not that hope is springing infernall in the human breast, and I'm right, as events proved next day, for the birds had flew. When I say birds, I specify hawks.

Still, in the meantime, I carried on with a grimm jest on my lips, feeling like death warmed up and twice

as jolly. Of such women as me is Empires formed. Rudyer Kipling ought to make a poem about me. I deserve it.

And with this reflecxion I kiss my hand to 75 pounds, a fond adew. It's Mrs. Miller I can't get over. I hated the Van Hoop, but Mrs. Miller I liked and trusted. She ought to be a movie star. She's wasting her time making a mere 200 pounds a day.

WELL, I retuin to England at the end of the week. Barcelona is no place for me, I've come to the conclude. I'm too much of a ingenoo to be let loose without a keeper. My telegrafic adress ought to be "C vent."

But what's a poor lass to do? E esty isn't no good for profit, dishonesty's equally fruitfull.

Not that Mrs. Miller would a with me re latter statement, nor Van Hoop.

Why did I call this bedtime st "Mary Had a Little Lamb"?

Mrs. Miller's front name Mary.

And she had a little lamb alri alright.

Said lamb being yours coy and nocent, Auntie Angel.

Good-night, pets, good-night.

What Is Truth?

Sir Walter Raleigh, in his prison in the Tower of London, had snatched a few moments from his writing on the second volume of his History of the World, to gaze down into the courtyard.

Suddenly, he was attracted by a disturbance. He saw one man strike another, who, by his dress, he supposed to be an officer. The latter at once drew his sword and ran his assailant through the body. The wounded man retaliated by felling his adversary with a stick, and then sank to the paving stones. At this point the guard came up and carried off the insensible officer and the corpse of the man who had succumbed to the sword thrust.

Next day Raleigh was visited by a friend, to whom he related the story. The friend at once declared Raleigh had mistaken the whole series of events which had passed under his eyes. The supposed officer was the servant of an ambassador. It was he who had dealt the first blow. He had not drawn a sword. It was the other who had snatched the sword from his side and run him through the body. A stranger in the crowd had then knocked the murderer down with a stick, and some of the ambassador's retinue had carried off the corpse. The government had ordered the arrest of the murderer.

Raleigh protested his eyes had not deceived him, and, pointing to a stone slightly raised in the yard, said: "The man fell on that very stone."

"Why," said his friend, "I was standing on that very stone when the affray took place. This scratch on my cheek I received in snatching the sword from the murderer. Upon my word of honor, you have been deceived in every detail."

After the friend left, Raleigh picked up the pages of his history with a sigh. "If I cannot believe my own eyes, how can I be assured of the truth of one-tenth of what happened before I was born."

And on that he flung his manuscript into the fire.

The Death of Ra

The Legend of the Cover Design

ONE day!

Only one day to live!

Born at dawn—to die before night.

That is the fate of Ra—yesterday, today and tomorrow, for all eternity.

It is not punishment, for Ra was the creator of all things, even himself. He created the heavens and the earth, the gods and mankind.

He assigned their duties and gave them their places in the universe.

He, himself, as their creator and Sun God, is their light of life and of death.

There are two worlds, one for the living; the other for the dead.

To be the light for the living, Ra must live. To be the light for the dead, he must die.

He divided his time—the day for the living—the night for the dead.

Each day Ra, the Sun God, is born, to row across the heavens in his boat.

As you stand gazing westward over the vastness of sand, past palm trees, sphinx and pyramids, watching the afternoon draw to a close, you see the sun sinking way out beyond the end of the Nile. The heavens are filled with a glory of color—reds, yellows and purples, blended and diffused. What a gorgeous sunset, you say.

To you, yes. But to the old Egyptian?

Ah, no—what a glorious *death!* For that is the death of Ra!

He is paddling his boat out of this world of the living into the world of the dead.

The true worshippers of the Sun God in old Egypt often saw Ra in his boat at the time just before he sank down into the ocean behind the edge of this world, when his light grew dim with color as the clouds turned to purple lakes and golden rivers, over which Ra rowed his royal way to death.

As he is born in the first glowing burst of dawn, so does he pass out of this world in resplendent grandeur and beauty.

Yesterday, today and tomorrow, for all eternity.

FRED. T. EVERETT.

The Color of Crime

By ELIZABETH CORBETT

FROM what you read nowadays you'd think that farms are awfully funny places. I don't mean funny so much as queer.

In plays and stories farmers wouldn't ever have time to get the crops in, they're so busy committing murder and suicide. And the farmer's wife is either having her seventeenth child or going insane, which must be hard on the poultry.

Farm life isn't like that. No, I don't mean it's been saved by rural free delivery and the radio. It never was like that.

I ought to know, because my own days on the farm were forty and fifty years ago. You're right, I said fifty. If my hair hadn't turned gray I might not have bobbed it. But you don't catch me sitting down to grow old. I'll grow old if I must. It's the sitting down I object to.

Speaking of hair reminds me of a queer thing that happened once on a farm. It was as good as a play, too, or as bad. I haven't thought of it in years. But there was a long time when I couldn't see magenta without shuddering.

. Yes, I think it's an ugly color, but it isn't the ugliness that makes me shudder. If you plant a bed of scarlet geraniums, one of them always comes up magenta and spoils the bed.

I'm glad geraniums have gone out of style. But if you never saw magenta in the queer place I saw it, you won't mind whether geraniums grow or don't grow.

All this happened when I was a girl, back on a farm in New York State. But, properly speaking, I wasn't a girl on a farm. I was a girl on a whole string of farms.

You see, my father was English,

and had the gentleman farmer idea. He liked to live in the country and drive fast horses; but he didn't care for hard labor.

It might have been all right if he'd had money to begin with. As it was, he never even swapped horses without losing by the swap. We were always moving from a big farm to a smaller one. That's how we came to get in on this business.

My mother didn't have seventeen children, and she didn't go insane even from having to live with my father. She used to make excuses for his bad luck, and she was proud of his looks. He was a handsome man, and it was partly her fault if he knew it too well.

Between moves, mother used to teach school, or go dressmaking in the village. There were just the two of us girls, and when we grew up it left her pretty free.

When I was about seventeen we made one of our usual moves. We lost the Fenner Heights farm on mortgage and moved into the Vernon Center place. My father had a chance to get it cheap from Joe Sayles. Joe had got it easy enough, so he could afford to let it go cheap.

Of course there was such a man as Joe Sayles. What makes you think he wasn't a real person? Oh, I know he has passed into a sort of saying in our family! When they wanted a comparison for anything that was out of the common size, all the aunts and cousins always said, "That's big enough for Joe Sayles."

You've heard your grandmother say it, too. Of course you have.

Joe Sayles was a huge man. He must have been big to begin with, and as he got older he grew very fat. He had to have his hats and shoes and everything made to order.

If there was one thing he was more famous for than his size, it was crying in front of the jury. He was the most successful lawyer anywhere in our part of the state, especially in criminal cases. He could get anybody acquitted on any charge.

I suppose a good conscience is a nice thing to have on your side when you're in trouble. But it won't help you out half so much as a good lawyer.

JOE SAYLES took the Vernon Center farm as a fee. It had belonged to a couple by the name of Sykes. They'd been married a good many years, and had no children. They kept pretty much to themselves, and people used to hint that Sykes drank more than was good for him.

Well, one morning, a man who stopped in to sell him lightning rods found Sykes in the barn, clubbed to death. The bloody stick of wood was lying alongside of him.

His wife was in the house, starting to boil down her grape jelly. She claimed she hadn't seen anything of him since the evening before, when he went out to visit a sick cow. Why she hadn't looked for him even at breakfast time, she didn't explain.

The cow was sick, all right. It died while they were arresting Mrs. Sykes on the charge of murdering her husband.

She claimed that some tramp did it. And really, to see her in the court-room, you wouldn't think she knew enough even to get rid of an unpopular husband.

My father got interested in the trial. He used to drive over to Seneca every day for the sessions, though it was haying season and by rights he ought not to have taken the time.

He took me along with him the day Joe Sayles made his big speech to the jury.

I can see Joe now with the tears running down his fat cheeks, and he so busy roaring and waving his

arms about that he hadn't time to wipe the tears away. They splashed down on his vest.

Joe Sayles' description of Mrs. Sykes' life on the farm would have made these young writers sick with envy. Then he went on to tell how after her years of toil and self-sacrifice she was hounded by the minions of the law.

Every minute or so he'd make a dramatic pause as if he was ending a paragraph, and all his paragraphs ended the same way: "An innocent woman!"

It rang in my head for days afterward. "An innocent woman!"

Of course I knew that Joe Sayles took her farm as his fee for getting her acquitted. But I was only seventeen, and at seventeen you worship the biggest thing in sight, even if it's only a lawyer with the marks of too many tears on his vest.

We were sold up at Fenner Heights that fall, and papa got the bright idea of taking the Skyes farm off Joe Sayles' hands. I drove over with him when he went to see about it.

You needn't be surprised at his taking me. The farmers in books never take their families anywhere, but, you see, papa had never read those books.

He didn't know a farmer was supposed to act like a special kind of human. And by nature he was as kind as he was lazy. Lazy people often are.

Joe Sayles was as nice to use as need be, though I've an idea he stuck a thousand dollars more on the farm than he would have charged anybody else.

Papa had cleared a little above the mortgage on the Fenner Heights place, and they settled the bargain on the spot. The two men signed papers, and had a drink of whisky.

While they were sitting sociable, I struck in and told Joe Sayles how I admired his speech in defense of Mrs. Sykes, and what a great life it was to be a lawyer and go around protecting the innocent.

Joe Sayles beamed on me, but I thought papa looked uncomfortable. Usually he liked me to speak up and have my say; he was proud of me, because people always said I looked like him. Today was different, somehow.

He sent me downstairs ahead of him. But the office door was open a crack, and I went so slow that I heard what they said when they thought I was out of sight.

Papa said, "I suppose she really was innocent?"

And Joe Sayles said: "Innocent? She was as guilty as Eve!"

After that I wasn't so keen about moving to Mrs. Sykes' farm. The live stock had been driven to an auctioneer's, and I suppose the dead cow had been buried. But everything else was just as Mrs. Sykes had left it when they took her off to jail.

Did I say she was making jelly that morning? There was the kettle of spoiled jelly on the stove, and the glasses getting dusty on the table.

Mrs. Sykes never went back there after the trial. She simply disappeared. Joe Sayles had undoubtedly given her enough money to go where no one knew her. The story was that she had gone west, which in York state in those days meant anywhere beyond Buffalo.

Anyhow, there were patchwork quilts still on the beds, and a sunbonnet and overalls hanging behind the kitchen stove, and rubbish lying about in odd corners.

You know, lots of country people never throw anything away. They always think it may come in handy. And I guess Mrs. Sykes was more

saving than most. Her shelves and cupboards were a sight.

Most of the job of clearing out fell to me. As soon as we'd moved, mamma went into the village to do some dressmaking. A little cash is always a handy thing when you move. And she'd taken sister Mollie along to help her.

PAPA enjoyed the clearing out more than I did. Every time I opened a cupboard I'd jump, expecting a few of Mrs. Sykes' former husbands to fall out at me like Bluebeard's wives.

Of course I knew she hadn't made a habit of killing husbands. Sykes was enough for her, alive or dead.

But I'd think of her sitting there in her widow's black at the trial, watching Joe Sayles weep about her, and then I'd heard Joe Sayles say in that big voice of his, "Innocent? She was as guilty as Eve!"

But papa went through the kitchen cupboard taking down bottles and smelling of 'em, and in spite of all I could say he'd wet the cork of each bottle and lick it.

The Sykeses must have been great people to buy patent medicine, but they never took anything quite to the bottom of the bottle.

Papa tasted and tasted until I was sure he would make himself sick. And then away at the back of the cupboard he came on a bottle of hair dye.

"Eva," says he, "I've a good mind to try some of this on my mustache. I noticed yesterday that it's beginning to get gray."

"You ought not to do any such thing," I said. "You can't tell how long that's been in the house, or whether it was any good, to begin with. You'd just better let it alone. If you must dye your mustache, buy some dye in the village."

"There's just about enough left for one using," he says. "I'd like to surprise your mother by being very handsome and dashing. You know I'm to drive in and get her this afternoon to stay out here with us over Sunday."

"She will think you're just as handsome with your mustache gray," I said.

Of course that was the wrong thing for me to say. Anyhow, he'd thought of something else. With his best Sunday go to meeting and eyes on the parson face, he went on: "All these things were included in the price of the house. It's our duty to use them so far as we can."

Isn't that just like a man? He'd swap horses wrong or go to the county seat in the middle of haying, but when it came to a spoonful of hair dye in the bottom of a dusty bottle, he suddenly got economical.

I held my tongue then, though I looked hard and speaking like at him while he was dabbing that dye on his mustache and combing it in. It didn't look any too good when he'd got it on. It was a rusty black, that reminded me somehow of the clothes Mrs. Sykes had worn in court.

Papa looked at himself in a funny greenish looking-glass with one corner broken out. It was nailed up in the kitchen, and was the only looking-glass the Sykeses had in the house. Course he looked worse'n ever in that.

"I guess that will do, Eva, won't it?" he says, uneasy like.

"It's on now. It'll have to do," I snapped. In an argument with Mamma I always took his side, though often as not he was wrong. But it wouldn't do to encourage him too much when I had him to myself.

Just then a man drove into the yard and shouted for him. Papa went rushing out, and the two of them walked into the barn.

I saw out of the window that it was old Dave Prescott from Fenner Heights way. He'd come to trade horses. Every time he traded with Papa, Papa would get the worst of it. But then they might spend the whole morning swapping and not get anything swapped.

Trading horses is like billiards to a man, or this game of golf that everybody plays nowadays. It's a pleasant way to waste time; and if you don't figure to win, you learn to enjoy the game all the more.

Being left alone in the kitchen, I scrubbed out the cupboard, and laid clean paper on the shelves, and arranged the pots and pans we had brought from Fenner Heights. It looked so neat and homelike you'd never have known it for the same cupboard.

I threw the patent medicine bottles on the trash pile over near the orchard fence, to keep Papa from taking any more of the stuff. It took me two trips with a market basket.

When I got back the second time I found I hadn't taken the bottle of hair dye. It stood in the middle of the kitchen table, with a teaspoonful or so of the dye still left in it.

But by the time I noticed it, I'd put away my market basket and hung up my shawl. Anyhow, it doesn't do to try a man too far. So I let the bottle stand there while I started dinner.

I made a meat pie, because Papa was particularly fond of it, and it would make a good hearty dinner to stand by him while he drove to the village and back.

But I wasn't calculating to ask that old skinamulinx Dave Prescott to sit down with us. Every time I got near the kitchen windows I'd look out to see if Dave's rig was still standing there.

It was. The horse had backed the cutter into a drift, and was standing on three legs, trying to draw the other leg up under the horse blanket. I don't know where Dave got his horse blankets unless he had them made to order, they were so small and thin.

The meat pie was done to a turn. So I stuck my head out the kitchen door and yelled for Pa. I thought that would give Dave a hint to go. It was "Pa" I yelled, too.

A short word carries farther when you're shouting across the barnyard, and anyhow that was what we used to call them in those days. Your grandmother did, too. Oh, yes, she did! I've heard her chirp sweet enough about "Father," but only since he's dead. Always sounded to me as if she learned it off the marker on his grave.

PAPA didn't come for one calling, nor for two. So the third time, I went out on the back steps and took a deep breath, and just yelled, "Pa, this is the third time I've called you to dinner, and it's meat pie, and it's drying up in the oven."

The idea of meat pie must have been more attractive than Dave telling how good his horse was. Papa stuck his head out of the barn door, to tell me he'd be in the house in a minute. But I don't rightly know what he began to say. As soon as I saw him I gave an awful yell and ran into the house.

That scared him. He came rushing in to see if I'd had a fit or something. I had doubled up in the Boston rocker, and was laughing and crying all together. He stood over me and began to scold, thinking I had hysterics.

I couldn't get my breath to tell him what was the matter. But I pointed to the Sykeses' looking-glass, and he got the idea and looked at himself.

I didn't know my father even knew the words I heard in the next five minutes. The Sykeses had had that dye a long time, as he might have guessed from the dust on the bottle. When it was exposed to the open air the dye had turned.

Papa's mustache was magenta! No, I'm not exaggerating a bit. It was just the color of the one geranium that always spoils the bed.

The dye was set, too. Papa hadn't a thought to spare for his favorite dinner drying to a cinder. He got soap and hot water, and began to wash his mustache. He washed and he washed. He tried store soap and home-made soap. He tried clear lye.

Nothing started that color. If anything, all the washing made it a little brighter and clearer. It bloomed into what before the World War they used to call "Nell rose." I tell you, I was glad when the Wilsons went out of office and took their taste with them.

A man can drive into a village with a bright black mustache, though everybody knew it was gray a week ago. That is, he can if he's Jim Fowler. People may grin and say he's an old peacock. But at the bottoms of their hearts they wish they were peacocks, too.

But no one can go into any village with a mustache turned magenta. He'd never hear the last of that. So when all Papa's efforts to wash out the dye proved useless, he took the scissors and cut off his mustache. Then he shaved his lip.

I'd never seen him without a mustache, and his face looked awfully bare and funny. The only other clean-shaven man I'd ever seen was a Catholic priest over at Fenner Heights.

Like as not that was the reason priests never caught on better in York state and New England. People said it was the confessional and lack of freedom for the individual conscience that held them back. But people aren't so choice of their consciences as they make out. I believe it was the absence of whiskers.

We neither of us thought of Dave Prescott until after the mustache was off. Then I looked out of the window, and the horse and cutter were gone. Suppose he'd made up his mind, it was no use waiting any longer. The horse deal was off for that day, anyhow. Papa had something else on his mind.

Papa made a poor meal, though he took long enough over it. Then he groaned and said, "I've got to go into the village to fetch your mother. Heaven knows what she'll say when she sees me."

I said, "Like as not she'll think it's an improvement. Now that I'm getting used to it, I believe having no mustache makes you look younger."

He groaned again. "Liker than not I'll catch my death of cold with a bare upper lip. Or at least get a toothache."

I thought he was hinting for me to go after Mamma instead of him. But he didn't like to come out and say it, and I didn't let on that the idea had ever entered my head. I was still provoked at him for using that old dye. And I wanted to stay home, anyhow, so I could have the kitchen warm and supper started when Mamma and Mollie got back from the village.

But by the time Papa had been gone an hour, I wished I had taken his hint and gone in his place. The first winter days on a farm are gloomy, anyhow. You look out and see the snow beginning to drift, and think how, for months to come, the drifts will go on getting deeper.

Then, that was the first time I'd

ever been alone on that farm. I tried to keep busy with the straightening up, and, Heaven knows, there was enough of it to do.

But I'd keep going to the kitchen window to look out. And every time I looked across the farmyard at the barn, I'd think of the same thing.

I'd see old Sykes going out to look at his sick cow, and his wife stealing after him and clubbing him from behind with a stick of firewood. Then I'd see her back in the house, starting to boil down her jelly.

It didn't stand to reason she'd have gone on with her jelly if she'd just killed her husband. But I had Joe Sayles' word for it, and he ought to know.

Even at the beginning of December, twilight don't come so early on a hill farm, with snow on the ground. But twilight came that day, and then deep dark, and still there was no sign of my returning family.

They'd had time to drive into the village and back twice over, yet they didn't come. I piled wood into the stove, and sat close to it in the dark, and shivered and shook.

It may have been that grim house. It may have been the shock I'd had earlier in the day. Anyhow, I was scared stiff. A wood stove in full blast can beat any steam heat for baking a person. I had my shawl around me, too. Yet my teeth chattered.

I'd set my jaw until it ached; but every time I unclenched it my teeth again began to chatter.

Finally I made up my mind I must at least light the lamp. If they came home and found the house dark Mamma would be sure something terrible had happened to me.

I had a hard time getting a match to stay lighted, but the fourth one finally worked. And though my hand shook like a leaf in the wind, I finally got the lamp going.

THE first thing the light fell on was that bottle of hair dye, sitting in the middle of the table with a spoonful of liquid in the bottom. I stood looking at it as if I was bewitched.

Then, in spite of the darkness outdoors, I made up my mind to take that bottle and throw it on the dump. It had done all the harm it could do. Still, I'd be more comfortable when it was out of the house.

But just as I stretched my hand out for the bottle, I heard a sound outside the kitchen door. I didn't see how it could be the folks getting home. Even thinking about something else, I couldn't have missed the sleighbells.

I rushed to the window and looked, and, sure enough, there was no sleigh in the barnyard. But by pressing close to the glass and looking along to the side, I could make out that there was someone on the kitchen doorstep.

Now a woman alone on a farm doesn't open the door after nightfall unless she knows who's there. But fear of tramps and fear of fire and fear of the dark are all mighty tame alongside fear of you don't know what.

I'd have let Satan himself in that night and been thankful for his company.

I kept enough caution to ask through the crack of the door, "Who's there?"

Whoever it was muttered something, but I couldn't make out a word. The wind was rising, and at that minute a door or a shutter somewhere fell to with an awful bang

The wind may have wrenched the door I held, or maybe I let go for a second. Anyhow, somebody shoved past me into the kitchen.

As I turned around from closing the door, I saw that it was a woman. I felt an enormous relief. A picture of a cup of tea and friendly gossip about the neighborhood flew through my mind.

The next minute she had stepped from in front of the lamp, and I made out who my visitor was.

I stared at her. She stared back at me. She didn't know who I was. I couldn't believe she was herself. Yet she wore the same rusty black she had worn in court, and her skirt was wet to the knees from dragging through drifts. Her widow's bonnet was over one eye, and stubby ends of gray hair hung over one ear. Everything about her seemed to sag and droop.

I found my tongue at last and stammered, "Why, Mrs. Sykes, I thought you'd gone away."

She answered in a queer, dead voice, and the muscles of her mouth didn't seem to move. "I had gone away. This is the old farm, ain't it? How'd I happen to come back here?"

I thought of the old saying about a murderer returning to the scene of the crime. But all I said was, "Now that you are here, get good and warm. You'll catch an awful cold if you don't get dried out."

She looked at me out of eyes so far sunk in her head you couldn't see what color they were. "Should think you'd be afraid to have me stay," she says. "Don't you know who I be?"

"Guess I know all right who you are," I said. "Guess I'm not so sure what you've done. But guess if you did do it, it probably needed doing."

"Ah," she said, "you think the same as all of them!"

Joe Sayles' big voice seemed to boom in my ears, "Guilty as Eve."

Yes, I did believe she was guilty. The longer I looked at her, the stronger I believed it. It wasn't just her bad teeth and her stooped shoulders and her skin that was fallen into deep wrinkles like the folds of a bed blanket.

I was used to farm women who looked fifty when they were twenty-eight, women who didn't need to draw down a calash to keep men from looking at 'em, women who made living a sort of bad habit when all the interest of life had stopped just like a stopped clock.

Even in such women there's something left. A spark of humanity, your grandmother would have called it. Your grandmother was a great woman for dressing up, whether it was words or whether it was people.

But that spark was dead in Mrs. Sykes. That was why I wanted to be kind to her, same as you always are to a dead person.

I pulled the Boston rocker close to the stove and patted the cushion tied to the back of it. "You sit down and rest a spell," I said. "I'll boil the kettle and make you a good cup of tea."

I'D GOT bravely over my scare of a few minutes back. I was only seventeen, remember, and hadn't had much excitement except being sold up on one farm and moving to another.

I was tickled at the idea of being alone in the house with a murderess, and making a quiet cup of tea for her—yes, and making a murderess do as I saw fit.

I went on patting the Boston rocker and smiling at Mrs. Sykes. She started forward a step at a time, and I thought of a story I'd read somewhere about a man who

tamed a lion just by looking it in the eye. Then all at once she stopped dead still and jerked out, "Where did you get that?"

She had noticed the bottle standing under the lamp. Without waiting for me to answer she went on, "It was that started all the trouble."

"Yes. He finally had to shave it off," I said. Then I felt foolish. For of course Mrs. Sykes didn't know anything about Papa's mustache.

"All the trouble," repeated Mrs. Sykes. "It isn't as if I'd wanted to dye my hair. This preparation simply restores the natural color. It says so on the bottle."

"Have you had it a long time?" I asked. "Seems to me it must have spoiled."

"A long time," she answered. "It was a long time since I give up trying. A long time. But I'd kept my hair."

All at once she snatched off her widow's bonnet, with its cheap crape like a wet rag that had dried if itself. She had a lot of hair, of a queer faded color that wasn't exactly gray. Some of it hung in her eyes, and some of it hung down her back. But on the right side it had been cut off short and ragged, as if someone had started to bob it and then lost their nerve.

She pushed her hair out of her eyes and went on, "So long as a woman keeps her looks, she ain't lost everything."

It was funny to hear her go on, and yet it was mortal pathetic. Because she hadn't kept her looks or anything else. Sykes, in his grave, wasn't any deader. Yet she reminded me of something. Not death. I couldn't think what.

Just by way of saying something, I said, "So long as a woman keeps her looks, she can afford to go on waiting."

She took me right up. "They expect her to go on waiting. Year after year, without ever a word, to go on waiting, to go on hoping. He expected it."

I said, "Husbands are awful inconsiderate sometimes, from all I hear."

She shook her head. "Not my husband. I wasn't thinking of him when I bought the hair restorer. But it stood on the shelf a long time before I ever used it."

She might have clubbed Sykes over the head to remind him of her existence. Like enough she couldn't even remember if she did it. For it came to me then what she reminded me of. Sister Mollie used sometimes to talk in her sleep.

And Mrs. Sykes, answering what I said, but never looking at me, was exactly like a woman talking in her sleep.

I don't know if you've ever had any experience with a sleep talker. Seems with all of them, that, if you get on the line their mind is running on they'll answer you sensible enough, though they never know a thing about it afterward. Leastways Mollie always said the next day that I must of made it up.

I remembered the blood-stained stick they had shown in court. I could see Mrs. Sykes, like a sleepwalker, stealing out to the barn, clubbing her husband to death, and coming back to the house to look over the grapes for her jelly.

I began to shake again, but more with excitement than with fear. I said, quiet like, "I don't see how you knew how you did look. This looking-glass turns a person's face green, and sets it all askew."

"I never looked in the glass," said Mrs. Sykes. "But I couldn't help knowing my hair had changed. I

was washing my hair—that night."

I wondered if she'd told that to Joe Sayles. I said nothing but, "Hair's nice when it's just been washed."

"I was washing my hair, because Sykes had gone out to the barn. It didn't disturb him none if I was sick, but he'd sit up all night with a sick cow. I knowed that cow was awful bad, and I figured that would give me some time to myself.

"So I washed my hair and dried it. And, sure enough, Sykes didn't come back."

She paused a moment and then went on, "It was one of those warm evenings we sometimes get in fall. The house seemed sort of pleasant and quiet. I felt for once as if it belonged to me. I thought how nice it would be if Sykes stayed out in the barn all that night."

"The barn's a good place for a man," I said, just above my breath.

"My hair smelled so sweet and clean, and was so thick on my head," said Mrs. Sykes. "I sat running my fingers through it with my eyes closed. And then all at once it come over me, his hair must be gray, too, by this time."

"You knew it was gray, didn't you?"

"How could I know that, when he'd been gone so long?"

I gasped with surprise. It wasn't Sykes she was talking about. That queer shell of a woman, empty of everything but sin, had slipped back in her own mind to the man she loved. It must have been a long way back.

I whispered, "Had he been gone as long as it seems?"

She kept that sleep-talker voice. But her face grew the least bit softer as she said, "It was right after the war, you know. He went west straight from the army. But he stopped over one night, just to see me. That was a warm evening in fall, too."

I was born just at the end of the Civil War, so it seemed to me a long time ago. But Mrs. Sykes had been young then. And there had been a warm evening in fall, and a boy she loved.

I was careful not to startle her as I said, "You say he stopped to see you on his way west?"

"He called me down to the gate, and talked to me there for a long time. He couldn't come up to the house, because my father didn't like him. But he told me how he was going to take up a farm in the west, and make a home there, and then he'd come back for me.

"I remember his exact words, 'I'll come back as soon as I can. You've nothing to do but wait.'"

"Was that the last thing he said to you?"

"Not the very last. The very last thing was, 'Stand there until I'm out of sight, so that I can turn back now and again and see the moonlight on your hair.'"

The sleep talker's voice went on: "But he didn't come back. I'd promised to wait for him, and year after year I kept my promise. I turned away other chances. Father was always at me that Will had forgotten me. Maybe he had. But I kept my promise."

"Didn't you ever hear from him?"

"Not one word. At last my father died. I was an old maid by that time. I'd got past caring much what happened to me. Then Sykes come along, a widower who was looking for a second wife."

"So you married Mr. Sykes."

"After that, one day was so much like another that I lost all count of the time. Once in a long while I'd get panicky for the old days,

and think what if Will come back even now.

"Will was short with his temper and quick with his hands. And he told me to wait for him.

"It was when I was thinking about Will that I bought that hair restorer. Another time I bought a fancy nightgown all trimmed with lace, and still another a pair of white kid slippers and silk stockings to go with them.

"I used to hide the things away from Sykes. Though I don't s'pose Sykes would have ever noticed the difference. And I bought 'em with my butter and egg money."

"Then you still thought Will might come back?"

"Mostly I didn't think about anything at all. I'd go about my housework, and feeding the chickens and churning, and I didn't think about anything at all."

She was silent then. I heard the wind rising, and thought it was going to be a bitter night. The light of the lamp grew dim. I remembered I had forgotten to fill it. I hoped Mrs. Sykes would get out of the house before Papa came back. He would have something to say about my letting her in.

But her speaking of her butter and egg money gave me an idea. Mollie and I always had the butter and egg money on our farms, and lately we'd been saving it. We had six or seven dollars by that time, and we kept it in single dollars to make it look like more.

I slipped away to get it. But when I came back with the money in my hand, a queer change had come over Mrs. Sykes. She held her head on one side, and she began to speak in a queer, mincing voice.

"When I saw how pretty my hair was, I thought for once I'd go ahead with the rest of it. I heated more water and took a bath. Then I put on the lace trimmed nightgown, an the slippers and stockings like bride's.

"I had a few flowers in the house and I made them up in a nosegay Then I sat down in the big rocker and pretended Will was coming fo me. I put out the lamp and sa in the moonlight, and I pretende that he was getting nearer an nearer."

I stood stock still and looked a her, while I said: "But then, whe he didn't come?"

"I must have gone to sleep. When I woke up it was broad daylight I stood up to admire myself in the glass. But in daylight, in that silly nightgown, I looked like an old woman. I was scared Will wouldn't know me.

"Then all at once I remembered the hair restorer. I'd bought it the same time as those other kickshaws, but I hadn't never used it. I got it down and begun to comb it through my hair.

"But just as I got one side done, I heard someone hammering on the door. It was Sykes. He yelled for me to bring some hot water. The cow was worse.

"I scrambled into some clothes, and ran out to the barn with the kettle. Sykes poured out the water without ever looking at me, and told me to put over some more. I went back in the house and filled the kettle, and begun to start up the fire. I couldn't make the two things fit, Sykes with his sick cow and Will coming to marry me. So I suppose I was mortal slow.

"Anyhow Sykes come dashing into the kitchen, cursing about how much time I took, and the cow maybe dying right then. He snatched the kettle away from me. As he took it he looked at me. Then he looked harder and harder, 's if he'd never

seen me before. And then he begun to laugh.

"He laughed harder and harder. The kettle shook in his hands, and water spilled on his boots. Still he never said a word. But when he went back to the barn he was still laughing. He was laughing at me.

"I stood there dumblike for a minute, trying to remember what I'd been doing when he first called me. Then I rushed and looked in the glass. All the right side of my hair, where I'd put the restorer on it, had turned a kind of deep pink.

"The dye had gone bad on me, like everything else. And Sykes, that I'd worked for like a slave all these years—Sykes thought it was funny. He'd gone back to the barn, but I could still hear that laugh of his. I went out to the barn myself."

"And then?" I whispered just above my breath.

Mrs. Sykes never looked at me. I doubt if she knew she was talking out loud.

In that same sleep talker voice she went on, "When I come back I was breathing hard and quick, but I didn't dare take time to sit down and get rested. I set to work to wash the dye out of my hair. But it wouldn't come out."

"No, it wouldn't," I agreed in a fascinated whisper.

"So I took my shears and cut off all the hair the dye had touched, and burned it. Then I pinned the gray hair from the other side to cover my head the best I could.

And then I set my jelly on to boil down while I thought what to do next. But I never did nothing. There came a hammering at the door. I thought just for a minute it was Sykes after more hot water. But it wasn't. It was the veterinary out from the village. He'd found Sykes in the barn."

In my excitement I forgot to be quiet. I screamed at her, "Why didn't you tell that story in court? It would have given Joe Sayles the case of his life!"

"Tell it in court, and have them all laughing at me?" Mrs. Sykes sprang toward me, and for a second I was frightened.

Then all at once she went limp, and spoke like a sleep talker just waking up. "Tell what in court? What have I been saying?"

"You were telling me about waiting for Will, your lover."

"Yes, I waited all my life. He married someone else. Or he's dead by this time. Oh, you don't think —you don't think he's dead, too?"

She began to cry like a child that wakes up in a strange place. She'd lived all her life in a dream, you see, and now her dream was going back on her.

"Of course, he's not dead," I said. "He may be backward about coming for you, not knowing you're a widow. But he's not dead."

She looked at me through her tears. "If I could only be sure of that!"

"There's only one way to make sure," I said. "Go west, and look for him."

"You think I can?"

"Of course you can." I thrust the butter and egg money into her hand. "The west bound express stops at the junction. You get on it, and ride as far as your money will take you. And you'd better start right away, because it's a long walk to the junction, and you don't want to miss the way in the dark."

I REMEMBER opening the outside door for her, and that's the last thing I do remember. When I picked myself off the floor I was alone, and

the lamp had gone out. I still felt faint and queer, but I managed to grope around and get a light. And just after I got the lamp going my family drove into the yard.

They were all excited and noisy over what they thought was a good joke.

It seems that when Mamma saw Papa drive into the yard she recognized the sleigh, but she didn't know him without his mustache. She thought a stranger had come for her. So she threw up her hands and shrieked, "Something has happened to Jim Fowler!"

Papa thought that was a terrible joke. While Mollie was getting Mamma straightened out, he had to look up some of his cronies and tell them about the magenta dye. He made a good story while he was about it. So it was after dark by the time they got started for home.

They were so excited they never noticed how queer and quiet I was. I didn't tell them a thing until weeks afterward, when Mollie missed her share of the butter and egg money.

Late in the evening I went out to see if I could find any footprints to show which way Mrs. Sykes had gone. But it was snowing again, and I couldn't see a thing.

For the next week or so I was in mortal dread every time a neighbor came in for a visit. I expected to hear that Mrs. Sykes had been picked up dead in a field, or maybe found in the old stone quarry. But when spring came and the snow melted off, and still her body wasn't found, I began to hope she got clean away.

I did drive over to the junctio one day and talked to old Pete Da the station agent. But he was mortal old, and stupid, I couldn get a thing out of him. Mrs. Syk had come out of the darkness, an told her story, and gone back int the darkness.

It's always seemed funny to m that I was the only person wh knew what really happened on th Sykes farm the night Sykes di something that hurt his wife wors than all his years of bad treatmen Because, of course, she couldn't te that story to Joe Sayles and hav him bleating in court about he dressing up and waiting for he lover. I know if 'twas me I'd soone of run the risk of being hanged.

"I've always thought Mrs. Syke must have dreamed the lace trimme nightgown and the bride's stocking and slippers. Leastways we neve found anything like that around th house. But I know I didn't dream Mrs. Sykes.

When I got the lamp going after she'd left, I missed the bottle from beside it. There was only a spoonful or so of the dye left, but Mrs. Sykes had taken it along with her.

"It's an easy guess, that that was what she had come back for, because she wanted to keep anybody from finding out what had set Sykes to laughing at her. Then they might suspect the rest.

But an easy guess isn't always the right guess. Maybe she took the dye because it reminded her of that night she sat like a bride and waited for her lover. Happiness is a shadow anyhow, and that one night she had as much as most of us.

The Sap Rises

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By RICHARD WILMER ROWAN

"THE gent insists he's related to you, sir," the girl explained. "He has a letlet to introduce him, and he's waited all morning. He doesn't seem to be an actor. A playwright, perhaps. He talks and behaves a little strange——"

"Bring me the letter," I interrupted. "But don't say I have arrived."

"No, sir. I told him you weren't expected."

She was new in our office and eager to please; but she soon returned with a pink envelope and an expression of defeat. "He insists," said she, "that nobody but you, sir, should open this letter. I'm afraid I had to let him suspect you've come in."

"Never mind." My resignation seemed to perplex her. She could not know that I had recognized the handwriting, in that precise backhand, on the pink bomb she conveyed; and that I had grown suddenly anxious to learn what Alice, my stepsister, had to say in behalf of the caller who waited like a playwright.

Alice, I found, had composed four pages, our first lengthy communication in years. And, if eloquent, complete, even flattering in a way, she did not soften the blow.

Without warning and with that perfect assurance she had inherited from my stepmother, Alice was sending her son, her only son, into my employ. It was plain she expected my gratitude to mount swiftly to the level of the honor she conferred.

Just then, in strolled my partner, and I thrust the four pink pages upon him. As he read, he seemed to be impressed. "Getting a real bright lad, eh?" he commented foolishly.

"So his mother says."

"She ought to know."

"She would be the first to conceal the truth."

"Well, I guess we can find a place for him around here. Your sister's only boy——"

"My stepsister's only boy!" said I. "And the relationship is even more distant than that if you want me to go into it."

Max assured me he didn't, and I could tell he thought me vindictive—raking up some old family grudge against a clever youth, entirely innocent. "Anyhow, you'll see him?" said he. "If you don't, he'll only keep on coming here."

"And his mother might come with him."

"She writes well," Max observed, turning again to the letter's booming periods. "Ought to take up publicity."

"If she's like her mother, she could never boost anything she didn't own all by herself," I said.

"Is this lad's father living?"

"Not without an effort, I bet." Yet when I rang to indicate I'd see Alice's son, and he was being shown in, I tried honestly to regard him as just any young stranger wanting a job in the theatrical business.

OSWALD WELLS seemed to be about twenty when he presented himself before us, a slim, serious youngster with a crisp, shrill voice, very bright eyes and an uncontrollable absence of embarrassment. His hair was blond and a bit curly, he wore spectacles with gold rims, and clothes of an enterprising cut and pattern.

"Hello, Uncle Jim," said he, and we shook hands.

"This," said I, "is my partner, Mr. Ellenberg."

Oswald gave Max a hearty welcome to our family. "The Great Max, of course," said he. "You're photographed a lot. I recognized you passing through the outer office."

This sounded fresh, but Max beamed, as though he had never known any young sap before this one.

"It's a pity you and your mother didn't know this is our slack season," I began firmly.

"We knew," said Oswald. "But I couldn't wait."

Max grinned. "Lots of pep, eh?"

"It's a fact, I'm almost too full of it," said our caller, sitting. "Ever since I began to write, mother said——"

"Oh, then you write, too?"

"Quite well, thank you. And mother said I ought to work here with Uncle Jim and gain the necessary experience."

"Whatever that is," said I.

"It's merely an expression," Oswald explained. "I could guess this would be your dull season, as you never go in for musical revues. So I intended to come in late June. But, you see, for the practice, I managed an amateur entertainment at home. And we did well, till there was trouble about a division of the receipts. The man who owned the theatre had me arrested."

Max and I were stirred profoundly.

"And being arrested by a theatre owner convinced you and your mother there was need for you in the show business?"

"I wanted to be frank with you, Uncle Jim," said he. "There was some mean talk; it seemed a wise time to come away."

"Are you out on bail?" Max asked sympathetically.

But Oswald hastened to assure us the matter had been adjusted and the charge withdrawn.

"It was simply my fault in know-

ing so little about bookkeeping," he added. "I need to learn it, I suppose. Even here, in the city, where people aren't so narrow-minded——"

"A bookkeeper has to be particular almost everywhere," said Max. "But there are other jobs for you in our business, Wells."

"Oh, sure," Oswald agreed. "If I had to be tied to a desk all day, it might just as soon be in some bank."

I desired to tell him that bankers were as prompt as theatre owners when it came to arrests for mistaken handling of the receipts. But instead I suggested giving him an introduction to several bank men.

"I came here to work for you, Uncle Jim," he told me patiently. "All you do is hand me a job. I'll be no trouble; already I know my way about, even underground.

"I have been here three days and have a nice room uptown. I was green when I called here before, and didn't stick it out when they said you were not expected."

While Max frowned, I continued discussing the present dull state of our affairs. Our spring try-outs all in stock; our next Broadway production, if any, not till early September.

"But, say, you have two capacity hits," argued the genius sprung from my stepsister. He produced a half page of amusement advertising, and began quoting from ours: "Seventh smashing month! Fifth month! Seats eight weeks in advance."

"Fortunately we don't insert that stuff under oath," Max told him gaily. "As for the seats, you know they are built in and always kept at the theatres weeks ahead."

"You mean your two hits aren't going so strong?" Oswald exclaimed. "Why, then, that's fine! You do need me."

It was my step-parent, his grandmother, speaking. I caught the dominant accent. And, on the spot, he agreed to revive the fading successes which had carried our banner through the season.

"Jim, we do need him." Max winked to pretend his feeble-minded consent was all a part of the joke. "Come on, boy, you're hired, and go to work at once. You can help me take a couple of aspiring young artistes out to lunch."

"Actresses?" Oswald questioned.

"Yes, and friendly," said Max.

Spring was in the air and Oswald Wells was alive and twenty, but he did not permit his prospect to exhilarate him.

II

IT became my amiable partner's pretense that I had been reluctant to engage Oswald because of the relationship. "As if I care," said he, "when a cousin or so has got to be looked out for. One day my brother's kids will be big——"

I interrupted, reviewing certain awful collisions of the past, with my stepmother, and with Alice, her daughter. I mentioned my resolve to avoid renewing any acquaintance with the latter by denying myself intimacy with her only son.

But Max persisted that I'd grow fonder of Oswald, and value the services we were buying from him hereafter, for twenty-five dollars each week.

"It's of no consequence really where I start," he had said, while contriving to make it clear that twenty-five was his minimum. "I'll soon show you what I'm worth in this theatrical game."

Sundry remarks of this order caused Max to say, "Jim, don't harp on it that he's only a step-relation.

You know the show business. But this boy will talk and scheme himself further in a month than you did in the years before we got together. Not that I'm bragging of myself as your locomotive."

"Oh, you pulled me along," I conceded. "And I suppose now if Oswald's schemes ruin us, his talk will be useful to the auctioneer at our bankrupt sale?"

Within seventy-two hours Oswald was demanding a private conference with Max and me.

"Sounds serious," I worried. "Say, who were those girls you introduced him to?"

"Not the sort to trifle with our young man," Max parried, "unless one of us has paid him ten weeks in advance. Possibly he wants to report his progress."

Oswald did. "Luckily you are well off," said he. "You can afford to pay me all I'm going to earn."

"You're not asking for a raise?"

"Not just yet, no. But wait till you hear, and then do whatever you think is fair," he advised.

"You see, up at the house where I board, a most extraordinary thing has happened.

"When I arrived I said I was a theatrical man, but it passed off casually. Then, last night I had a chance to say I had connected with you, Uncle Jim, and the Great Max. And, my word, you should have seen the eyes that bulged. I suppose at first they doubted me, but now since they know me——"

"And how long is it that you've stayed there?" Max asked

"About a week. My mother had the address."

"Oh, a week; then they know you intimately," said Max.

"And what of it—do they want passes?" said I.

"Much better than that, Uncle Jim."

"Better than passes?"

"You see, there are two who write plays. Think of it! This immense city, with hundreds of places where I might live, and yet mother and I pick a house catering to genuine dramatists."

"Oh, so they're dramatists?" Max chuckled. "How I have always longed to see one some time."

"But you are a famous producer of dramas——"

"Which your uncle and I buy from playwrights, or play brokers," said Max. "Dramatists, alive, are rare, boy. Nearly extinct in this country, and dying out fast abroad, according to the highbrow gossip."

"Well, both these people where I live are sure enough dramatists, and American, too. A gold mine, eh?"

"Produced dramatists?"

"No, that's all right. Nobody's discovered 'em before me. We'll get absolutely the first chance to produce their best work. They agree to that."

"Do they think you speak for this firm?" I said.

Oswald appeared hurt, and Max began coddling him.

"You must realize, boy, it costs a heap to put over any first-rate play," said he. "We like your keenness. But we can't afford to undertake or promise productions, wholesale."

"How about options?" Oswald demanded.

"Customarily five hundred dollars; and not per dramatist, mind you, but per drama."

"I suppose it could run into big money," Oswald admitted. "However, trust me to persuade them to accept less. They both seem modest and eager about it.

"Last night I let them take turns reading plays to me. It made me late for breakfast and at the office

here this morning. If I was reported late, I want you both to know I'm not shirking."

We assured him that suspicion would be absurd in view of his evidently prodigal exertions as a listener.

"Oh, I didn't mind," said he. "They were fine dramas, and while I listened I thought of the profits."

"Now right here is where experience begins to go against you," my tactful partner observed. "You can't help us much until what you think is a fine, profitable play very closely resembles what we think is a fine, profitable play. You had better get around to the theatres more. See the hits; look in on some failures. If you move fast you may even view a flop before it goes to the storehouse.

"I'll speak to Eddie and have him get you tickets," Max pursued. "Try getting acquainted with the people in our two shows. If you want to write plays, or produce plays, or act, or design scene sets, or even write reviews and lecture ladies in drama clubs—no matter what, the place to learn is in the theatre."

"Very well," said Oswald, "I'll not mind longer hours. I'll study a play for you every night." And he added, "The passes Eddie can get me, I suppose they'll admit two?"

We agreed. And when he had gone, we debated it, Max declaring Oswald's place of abode required my early inspection. "Jim, it's up to you," he said. "Run up and see how the lad is living, and among what?"

"And stand for a reception from dramatic geniuses in blank verse? Sit up all night hearing heavy plays weighed by their parents? No," I cried, "his mother gave him the address; he told us that. I'd be a fool to interfere."

"But his wanting tickets for two sounds more nearly his age than he's appeared so far," Max retorted.

"That first day, lunching with Estelle Carney and her Titian friend, our Oswald talked and acted like the shade of Augustin Daly come back in a boyish disguise.

"Up there at the boarding-house, we can't have some torrid dame giving herself wrong ideas because the lad is sort of your relation," he said. "Next thing she'd be suing us for breach of contract, claiming Oswald promised to get her a production of her play, one of those aromatic Oriental things, in twenty scenes and seventy characters, with no costumes and two camels for atmosphere."

FINALLY I agreed to call upon Oswald without warning; just drop in on him after dinner, look the ground over, and then try to get away before even one newly discovered dramatist could fasten upon me.

The boarding-house was on 94th Street, near Central Park West. I left Rodgers, my chauffeur, to wait for me on Columbus Avenue, and walked down the block to make an inconspicuous approach.

However, I found the house too brightly lighted to encourage my project; I suspected a party in the making, perhaps with dramas to be read!

Hesitant, I strolled on past the door and then turned back. A couple came out of the house, and, never noticing me some twenty yards off, turned west toward the avenue where my car waited.

It was Oswald and a girl. And I followed them discreetly, not as a sleuth—I could guess they were bound for a theatre—but because I, too, might now return downtown,

my excuse being this interruption of circumstances not within my power to control. Max would have to accept it.

Under the street lamp, in the middle of the block, Oswald's fair companion appeared to be young and attractive. She seemed smartly dressed, though not in evening clothes; and I presumed she was considerably his senior.

They were absorbed in each other. She was letting him talk, and an occasional phrase of his, shrill, emphatic, came back to me, though I allowed them to gain with every stride.

Twice Oswald halted and turned, but briefly and not on my account. I decided he meant to hail a taxi. Upon reaching Columbus Avenue he again rather grandly looked about him, while ignoring the "L" as a conveyance directly above his head. Then he discovered my car with glad surprise.

He guided his companion to it and had the door opened for her even as he spoke to Rodgers, with whom he was on intimate terms after the slightest possible association. There was some parley, but a chauffeur's resistance was not enough to check Oswald. He helped his charmer into my car, and off they rolled, leaving me to locate the taxi.

Next morning I found a memo on my desk which read: "Important. Brief report to make. O. W." And when I sent for Oswald, he reported Rodgers.

"Don't like doing this, Uncle Jim," said he, "but loyalty to you comes first while you employ me. He's a good chauffeur and careful, and a pleasant enough fellow, too, but last night I found him up my way on Columbus Avenue, just waiting. Loitering, I'm afraid, Uncle Jim.

"Rodgers was very evasive when I tried to question him. I had a friend with me, so I told him to drive us to the theatre. I knew you'd approve, and I hoped it might keep Rodgers out of some mischief. Yet he flatly refused to take a carriage check and call back for us; he said it was impossible."

Max had not yet appeared, so I felt free to be firm with Oswald and warn him against impromptu interference with any of our other employees. I said Rodgers was attending to a confidential matter, not loitering. And that in case of need I preferred to engage professional private detectives.

TO Rodgers I ventured to apply for some news of Oswald's fair companion, having already confessed my purpose in attempting the clandestine visit to 94th Street.

"She seemed a real nice girl, Mr. Kirke," said he. "You've no cause for alarm about the lad there, I'd say. He started to get sore when I told him "no" on the carriage call. But she just laughed it off, took his arm and said they'd probably feel like walking a ways when they came out."

"She's older?"

"Yes, sir. So it seemed to me."

"Then she admits it and doesn't try to appear as young or as cute as the youngest?"

"No, sir," said Rodgers, with gratifying certainty. "No flapper stuff, Mr. Kirke, just the good pal sort."

Thanks to my luck in picking a subtle chauffeur I was able to assure Max that Oswald Wells was only in danger of calf love and intellectual processes.

"But, Jim, that's just the bad feature," he said. "Some clever woman, trying to get herself or her

play on the stage, will convince the boy he's an object of veneration."

"His own opinion has hardened him to that fantasy."

"Some woman," Max pursued, "will make him think he has won her completely. He'll start planning to elope, while she is only estimating royalties of seven and a half per cent over five thousand. And he'll be deeply hurt when he wakes to the truth, Jim. We can't have the boy broken up just because sirens use portable typewriters."

The horror of it didn't overcome me. I remarked that Oswald's temperament came to him through several generations, and that, though born a Wells, he was a natural Emling, like his mother, Alice, or her mother—whom my father had wed, so that when no longer a widower he yet had reason to mourn. And this marked Emling strain in Oswald defended him from all things, or anybody, opposing his comfort or prosperity.

"If you think I merely embellish a low opinion," I told him, "put Oswald to the test; introduce him to some of these girls you know. The fur coats and wrist watches they'll take from him will have interchangeable parts and can be hid under a drop of pure distilled water."

"You said he was hunting a taxi last night when he spotted your car, Jim. That's pretty game on twenty-five per."

"But he thinks this theatre going is his work and a big favor to us. Taxis 'll be charged up to overhead."

"You're too hard on the boy," my partner objected. "You'll be sorry. I don't intend to forfeit his confidence."

Max got his reward two days later in the form of a memo on his desk, initialed "O. W." As I was leaving the office in the afternoon, I saw Oswald enter with a fireman in uniform.

And, later, I heard from Max of the new discovery. "The boy's worth every cent we give him, just for the laughs he brings in. Now it's a great actor he's found us, Jim."

"Not that fireman?"

"Yes, that fireman—McGee. A stage-struck fireman! What an idea for a farce?"

"I can't laugh till I hear what we have to do."

"Oswald only promised the interview with me, and it has just taken place," said Max. "This McGee's attack is serious, though. He's with a truck company, somewhere downtown.

"It's his station—that's what he calls the fire house—which has to send a man to the Mordaunt Theatre. By trading off with other firemen, McGee manages to be on duty there several performances a week.

"Also, it seems he gets passes and can work an occasional exchange with men in other companies having different theatres. Anyhow, McGee sees most of the shows. And he's learned parts in three of them, if you please, including ours at the Mordaunt."

"Thus Oswald discerned his great talent?"

"Yes. Eddie Deal took Oswald behind at the Mordaunt, during the second act. Oswald met McGee and they talked. It seems that Oswald knew of some play he has read which offers a fine part to an actor of the type McGee says he is."

"This play the work of a fellow boarder?"

"Jim, I'm afraid so. It is growing complicated," Max confessed. "Oswald met McGee at the Mordaunt again last night. After the

show, Oswald being your relative, some of the company agreed to run through a couple of scenes with McGee.

"Perhaps they were kidding, but they convinced McGee and Oswald, too, that here's one great actor being wasted in rushing around to alarms of fire."

"Well," said I "what are we to do about it—appeal to the Commissioner, or burn down something?"

"First, we'll have to put Oswald on fixed post," said Max. "It's all funny enough, but I now see with you that his pace and ambition can make us stacks of commotion.

"The harm comes from his seeming close relationship to you. When people convince him their work is great, his enthusiasm and joyous response gives them the notion they're as good as set on Broadway in electric lights, with you and yours at the switch."

III

DESPITE our joint resolve to take from Oswald his roving commission, we were not quick enough.

"I've been with you almost two weeks," said he, evidently meaning to reassure us if any raise in pay was under consideration. "Naturally you want to know if I've learned the business and am ready to begin making good."

Max cut in on my impatient outburst and said more gently: "We don't expect you to have learned the show business, son. For years your uncle and I have been trying to learn it. And we're called pretty successful, post grad, past master, and so on. Yet even so, we miss a good many, when it comes to picking the hits from fouls and bases on balls."

"I believe I have learned the show business thoroughly, so far as it relates to this office," replied Alice's typical offspring. "Not that I'd try to stage a big revue. I'm still weak on stage lighting. And then there's my poor bookkeeping which I warned you about.

"But, otherwise, I'm ready to go ahead, and before I tell you what I can accomplish for the firm, perhaps you'd both like to ask me a few questions, to prove my knowledge isn't mere youthful fancy?"

"We know you work hard," Max said. "But don't be too serious or disparage youth; it's precious. Try to have a good time on your way up, boy. How about that young lady who has been seen with you at the theatre?" he demanded.

"You possibly mean Miss Wayne," Oswald answered, his confusion invisible. "I was coming to her; a very clever, captivating girl. I've enjoyed taking her out, yet our being much together is mainly a business matter, after all."

"Well—well," Max said faintly.

"It didn't take me long to get onto the sarcasm in your remark about dramatists being so scarce," continued Oswald. "With a single exception, the plays read to me uptown differed absurdly from those actually produced, that I've been studying in various theatres.

"And, considering the number of productions here which may be studied, I can't see why the aspiring playwright need get so far astray. However, I dare say too many amateurs imagine that they've nothing to learn."

"That's their weakness—too sure of themselves."

"Exactly," said Oswald. "And since I show such judgment in rejecting all other plays submitted to me, you can both rely on my word that Marcia Wayne has written a hit."

"That doesn't follow," I put in. "Thousands can detect a bad play.

It's sometimes pitiful to watch 'em doing it; vast crowds shrewdly staying away from a flop."

"Marcia's piece won't flop, Uncle Jim."

"She says so herself?"

"No, but McGee says so, and he's unprejudiced."

"I thought he wants to act. Is he a critic, too?"

"McGee," Oswald confided, "is the average playgoer. If he enjoys a play, it means millions of folks like him will enjoy it. Don't you see?

"Just to give you an example of how trustworthy McGee is as a critic, there was another play up at the house that I found impressive," he said. "Old Mr. Mercer wrote it, years ago, he admits.

"And it's all about a junk shop; it has only the one character, a junk dealer. But, of course, all the junk in the junk shop has belonged to other people before, and the play is written so as to make its audience feel those unseen characters—the former owners of the various treasures and small possessions that are now just junk.

"The plot is that the lonely junk dealer feels this clinging ownership, too, until finally he goes raving mad and kills himself with a cavalry sabre, which is one of the most poignant pieces of junk."

"Where does McGee expose his brain in this?"

"Why, I told him the plot and even quoted some of the lines; it's all soliloquy," Oswald answered, "and McGee studied for hardly a moment. Then he said: 'Kid Wells'—he calls me that—'Kid Wells,' he said, 'that script can't be just a piece of cheese, but it is awful symbolic.'

"And he was right. So is he right again about Marcia Wayne's play, a comedy drama, with heart appeal and humor, tremendous punch, and very rich opportunities for scenic investiture——"

"Now who is talking?" I asked.

"I still am," said Oswald. "The play's called 'A Jezebel of Java,' and we have paid Marcia five hundred dollars for a year's option, using the regular contract."

"Who is *we?* And whose is the five hundred?"

"McGee has saved and been thrifty, Uncle Jim. He said he could easily afford two hundred."

"You raised the other three hundred? How?"

"Thirty-four dollars was my own," said he. "The rest, two hundred sixty-six, came from persons who have faith in me and this firm: Rodgers, your chauffeur; Eddie Deal, Mr. Orme, the Mordaunt house manager; forty-five from Mr. Muller, whose wife runs our boarding house, and so on."

"Financial wizard!" Max uttered.

"Rather," Oswald agreed. "I'm Miss Wayne's agent, so I deduct ten per cent commission. That has given me back my thirty-four dollars, and sixteen more, to start with."

IV

IT'S humiliating to relate that, practically from the beginning, Max deceived me in this "Jezebel of Java" affair. He was amused by Oswald and his complete assurance; and when Max is amused his judgment falters. Besides, the faltering hardly counted after he met Marcia Wayne.

McGee, I insisted, and the others who thought we were in back of Oswald, must not lose their money on his say-so. I desired to pay off everybody, Oswald included, and cancel thus and forever his showman's career.

But Max opposed me; and he deliberately worked against me. He

asked Oswald to bring Miss Wayne and her play to our office. He was even sly about their appointment, choosing an hour when he knew I must go to meet some motion picture people.

And then, of course, Marcia Wayne proved to be a pretty girl, smartly turned out, well educated but not aggressively intellectual, and old enough to find Max much more interesting than her young discoverer, my step-nephew.

She read Max her "Jezebel of Java" piece, and made him believe it was a play.

But he could guess I would hold out against it, and he couldn't commit the firm without my consent. So he said very craftily: "We managers, you know, seldom risk our own money. We find backers and do the work of producing. Your play, Miss Wayne, ought to attract certain backers I have in mind. I'll take it up with them at once, and meanwhile the option stands."

Marcia Wayne then smiled upon my susceptible and celebrated partner. She said her poor little drama must bristle with faults he would want to correct. It called for nine scenes and nineteen characters; but Max told her the script was in good condition. Of course, he knew he was going to be one of the backers he had in mind.

And next day he told Oswald that the "Jezebel" seemed certain to achieve New York production.

"That was understood," retorted Alice's only bloom. "But, of course, I am glad to have experienced men like you and Uncle Jim and your backers in with us. It's a great play property. Trust me not to count chickens that won't feather my nest——"

"Do you mean Miss Wayne?" Max spoke up sharply.

"Oh, sure not. It's a line from her play I was quoting. You remember 'Judd,' the comic missionary, who carries a side line of typewriters and cosmetics and tonics?"

"In rehearsal some of that may have to be cut. The script is rather long," said Max, approaching sanity when not left alone with Marcia and Oswald together. And he further cautioned the latter about bothering me. He said I was busy upon another matter.

"Also, boy, let's look at this 'with us' kind of talk," he added. "Remember, these Wall Street backers who like a flier in the show business, are used to millions. They'd not care about a 'Jezebel of Java' production if we have to have a lot of twenty-five and fifty dollar investors."

"Then I'll return the small loans. Only McGee and I will participate," Oswald answered.

"But McGee mustn't forget his acting ambition."

"Don't worry; he isn't. There's a fat part for him, you know, in Marcia's play. The opium peddler."

"He's paying two hundred dollars to play a Chinaman? How did he ever come to overlook the lead?"

"McGee doesn't kid himself. But he says he's sure he can play Hong Li Pong, the peddler of opium, because his hook and ladder truck is constantly rolling to fires in Chinatown. He meets dozens of Chink types."

Max then observed that McGee should study hard during the summer. "With his determination and enough alarms in Chinatown," said my partner, "he may really turn himself out a perfect stage Chinaman by fall."

"Will these silly backers want to hold off till the fall?" Oswald's query was almost a cry of pain.

"There's no hurry," said Max. "You didn't expect a summer run,

did you? Wise showmen never crowd the seasons. It's so much cheaper to use a calendar."

"But we can't disappoint McGee."

"Will the public, in hot weather, mind disappointing McGee? No, the public will go swimming and let McGee take his brand new Chink acting back to the hook and ladder business."

"But I picked this play for a warm weather hit," Oswald argued. "Costumes are slight in Java all the year round. But audiences here will enjoy seeing them in summer."

"The kind of audiences that enjoy the undraped drama, son, are just as alert for art's sake, fall or winter."

"Mr. Orme told me you'll close 'Nightshade' in four weeks, just time for rehearsing the 'Jezebel,' and we can get the Mordaunt for a reduced guarantee in summer."

"We control the Mordaunt," said Max.

"Yes, that's what I meant. You and Uncle Jim won't expect to divert much money from the production in securing us a theatre that you practically own yourselves. "And Mr. Orme says," Oswald persisted, "that very good players will accept r e d u c e d salaries in the spring, if we call it an all-star revival."

"Nobody ever heard of Marcia Wayne's play before. How can we call it a revival?"

"They have heard of Java."

"Yes, and of Jezebel. But for warm weather——"

"Hot climate is written right into the play," said Oswald. "I tell you, McGee must get his big chance soon. Think of the publicity that's in him! Up the ladder to fame on Broadway! Can't you see him pictured on a fire ladder, with his boots and helmet and rubber coat."

"It's all no use in summer," Max proclaimed.

And for almost a day he remained resolute, whereupon Oswald sandbagged him in a very unfair way. He came at Max once more and he knocked out the excuse about downtown backers who wouldn't unbelt for a production out of season. He said to kiss such craven capital good-by, he had found a new backer, and everything could start to move immediately.

"Muller, whose wife runs the boarding-house I live at," said Oswald blandly, "he put in forty-five dollars when McGee and I raised the option payment. I told him we might lose if we were delayed till fall.

"Muller got the idea that your rich bankers are freezing out the little fellows. So he now says he'll raise as much as ten thousand to protect his interest."

"Practical chap—to risk ten thousand protecting forty-five," Max commented.

"Well, he has ten thousand. That is what is more practical in our young lives," Oswald said. "You see, he really owns the boarding-house, but he has kind of put it, and all the work of runnin' it, in his wife's name."

Max couldn't see Oswald coax a mortgage onto that 94th Street dwelling, even though Muller was reported to be eager about it. My partner agreed to allow the forty-five dollars to stay in the gamble.

And soon he himself was behaving just like any big noodle designer. He put aside all his keen knowledge of the theatre, as it were; he lied to me repeatedly. "A Jezebel of Java" began to be rehearsed.

A good deal of trouble straightway developed around Jack McGee, the talented fireman, not because he didn't try or couldn't make good, but because Max had considerately

insisted he must not quit the fire department job until the play went over, and McGee's regularly scheduled hours of duty made his rehearsal attendance rather intermittent.

Moreover, every time McGee got up in a line, so he could read it to suit Warner Harrison, the director, then he became bored and had to have another line added to his Chink part for him to struggle with.

Oswald would persuade Marcia to write it, and then she'd persuade Max it ought to go in; and poor Harrison would need to start perfecting McGee all over again.

I found Max about ready to admit that Hong Li Pong, the drug dispenser, was even more a wicked menace at their rehearsals than in the plot and action of the play.

V

ONE NIGHT, it was April 27th, McGee was on his twenty-four hour stretch of duty, and Oswald had come down to the fire house to keep his partner informed of the events of the day he had missed. An alarm rang in while he and McGee were concocting some new business for the third act, and Oswald contrived to go to the fire with the truck, riding on the side away from the captain, who pretended not to have seen him.

It was what McGee and his mates called a "worker," a bad one at that, in a tenement on Mulberry Street, where a still had exploded, and flames already going up through the roof.

There was a fearful din when the truck rolled up, with old people and women and children crowding in every upper window. Oswald claimed to have saved a dozen; and one policeman did say "a young fellow named Wells" followed him into the tenement and brought out an armful of kids.

But McGee's company raised their aerial ladder, and up scrambled McGee the first. Five poor wretches were burned to death in that roasting tenement; but McGee himself rescued an aged couple and a mother and her three children.

He got so badly scorched about the hands and face, another fireman had to pull him out of the blazing window and take him down to an ambulance doctor.

Jack McGee's career on the stage is yet in doubt, but unless he makes a star actor, it seems a pity to spoil such a darned good fireman.

Two days later, on sick leave and bandaged to the eyes, he came again to rehearsal at the Mordaunt. Obviously his chance to open with the "Jezebel" was at zero.

"And he took this great disappointment," said Max, "just as bravely as he'd taken those singed and shrieking people from the top floor of the tenement where the fire mushroomed. Everybody, even the suffering Warner Harrison, stopped to pat him on the back and call him a big hero."

"You were magnificent, Jack, up there on that swaying extension ladder," Oswald exclaimed. "No fame will ever yield you a finer pinnacle."

"Boy, that's eloquent," Max applauded, helping McGee to cover his almost sickening embarrassment. "True, too!"

"Of course. I prepared it in a speech I'll deliver as an eye witness, if there's a testimonial banquet held in Jack's honor," Oswald said.

"I want to act, not eat," McGee murmured.

"And you shall act. We're due for a long run, and you'll be Hong Li Pong again when your burns have healed."

"My eyebrows are gone. I'll be able to make up as a sure-enough Chink," McGee hinted hopefully.

"And if my face is scarred for a while it will help out the evil expression."

Meanwhile, Max and Harrison had found somebody to rush into the part. Luckily, Frank Brackett took over Hong Li Pong's opium peddling; and on the opening night he played the Chink exactly as McGee had rehearsed him for Harrison, burying most of the melodrama under a personal comedy hit.

For any such evening of promise I'd dreaded that Oswald might import his mother and her opinions. But, escaping that fate, the rest seemed pretty good entertainment to me. The press notices next day were what we like to call "generous."

Before and during and directly after this first performance of Marcia Wayne's play, young Oswald maintained such uncanny composure, I think most of us actually avoided him. It was unnatural and revolting.

While Marcia, in contrast, was excited, nervous and radiant. After the second act curtain when her "Jezebel" got a big hand—thanks chiefly to the comic laundryman put over by Brackett—she came and kissed Max joyously, and then she kissed me. Which was both a pleasure and a revelation.

It proved at least that she thought I was also sponsoring the production. So, after the final curtain calls, I had to drag my squirming partner aside, and I questioned him in a way I have, until he admitted the whole absurd and pitiful deception.

MAX had even allowed me to believe in the Wall Street backers, stalked by Oswald, with Marcia Wayne's manifest charm to finish the stick-up. But now I realized he would himself drop at least ten thousand dollars—because my stepsister had just the one bright boy to give to the show business.

"You've let him trim you, to keep that old fool Muller from mortgaging the house over his wife's head," said I.

Max declared he could better afford it. And I said Oswald had come with an introduction to me, so I would afford it, too. Then Max turned optimistic.

"Anyhow, maybe we won't lose," said he. "The show looks good. Queerer things have pulled through."

"Not queerer things than Oswald. Wait and see!"

For the first two weeks the business at the Mordaunt was indecisive. But then it began to sag as each day grew more summer-like. On May 30, the holiday matinee found our "Jezebel" a wilted wanton. The receipts that day—two performances—were less than three hundred dollars, and more than half of this at cut rates.

"But say, we have got to wait for Jack McGee," Oswald urged when he heard Max agree that the show must close.

"Better buy out the house for ten weeks in advance," said I. "Then you can toy with the thing all summer. Get more girls and fewer costumes and call it a revue."

"If old Muller still is game, I will," retorted Oswald. "There are several good spots for dance numbers."

"If you go after Muller again, there will be another spot marked "X" because your body was found on it."

Then Max came between us and said he would phone to McGee himself. And it was the fireman who finally vetoed Oswald's wild desire to run the "Jezebel" at a loss, though not his own, of course.

Whereupon it took him less than two days to acquire a new and disquieting interest.

Certain of the tenement families appeared to be in want since that disastrous fire, at which McGee had not been the only hero. Besides those who perished, many had been seriously injured.

McGee had all the details; and plans for a monster all-star benefit were launched from our office, even before we gave our consent.

"Why, sure, I knew you both would want me to take a leading part in this good cause," announced the dazzling youth whom we still were permitted to retain for a small sum weekly.

"You'll lend the Mordaunt Theatre, certainly. It's mentioned in the sob stories that the papers are releasing tomorrow. We should sell out at a five dollar top and roll up part of the international debt."

"Were these tenement people foreigners?"

"Yes. But I didn't allude to that," Oswald replied.

"And when is this rolling process to take place?" Max queried.

"A week from this coming Sunday night."

"In your publicity," I warned him, "remember to emphasize the loss of life, not the division of receipts among the survivors. I can't have you responsible for encouraging an epidemic of such fires."

Oswald said he wouldn't mind conducting similar affairs the year round, if the supply of sufferers held out.

"We'll have to ask McGee to read him the criminal code about arson," said I to Max. "Once he gets a taste for such public functions and handling money for charity——"

"I'm afraid, Jim, he is going to be treasurer of this one," Max revealed. "But with McGee helping him, there oughtn't to be much indifference in the bookkeeping," he added, reading my thought.

And I promptly spoke the rest of it, declaring that if Oswald got himself under arrest in New York, I'd resist any effort to bail him out.

But now our Oswald seemed to ride a great wave of popular esteem, no less. He spoke very familiarly of civic leaders who were mostly just names in the papers to Broadway's average habitant.

He had tea with society ladies, including all the noted patroness addicts. A program was planned with all participants' names to be lettered in gold.

Marcia Wayne volunteered to help Oswald, which meant that Max drafted himself on to the job also. Between them it was arranged to give the charity fund a kind of option on the sale of the motion picture rights to "A Jezebel of Java." Anything over ten thousand dollars offered by a picture producer would go to the tenement fire victims.

Oswald even beat this price down to seventy-five hundred, since there had so far been no picture interest in Marcia's play that we could discover. And, said Oswald, the mere announcement was worth the difference, with its credit and glory for all concerned. A magnificent, munificent gesture, he called it! In fact, he had begun to use adjectives now for anything.

The charitable Sunday night arrived with Oswald's high hopes and much humidity. But, to do justice to him and his sundry associates, they did put over an original, entertaining and enthusiastic benefit program as advertised, and the more remarkable because of short notice and the season of the year.

Max told me he heard that the total receipts would be huge. We expected Oswald to brag about this

detail when he came around to the office, perhaps on his next pay day.

VI

ENDING its final fortnight, the "Jezebel" was made ready for extinction in the storehouse. However, since Frank Brackett had been so funny as Hong Li Pong, I suggested to Max that we invite Marcia Wayne to study up on other Chinese types over the summer and do a farce that Frank could be featured in, late in the fall.

Of course, Max cheered my thought. He inquired, and Marcia pronounced herself full of farcical ideas as well as a great resolve to give the public something it wanted to pay for.

So I asked her to have dinner that evening with Max and me at my apartment, where the whole project might be discussed without office interruptions.

Well, we had scarcely finished dining and started our talk, when Max was called to my telephone by the fireman, McGee. I knew instantly that Oswald was somewhere involved. But why? How? Or for how much?

Max was not his usual sanguine self when he returned to us from the telephone.

"Jim, I've got to tell you," he said at once. "It's all too sudden and it looks too serious for me to attempt handling it alone. McGee says Oswald has not turned in his financial report, or met the benefit committee. Jim, the boy seems to be in bad. McGee is afraid that he's short some thousands of dollars."

It had come at last. "Is McGee really certain about it?" I asked.

"He is certain. Oswald hasn't turned the money in, or appeared in person. He seems to be hiding."

"Oh, but surely it can be explained," said Marcia.

"Yes, right in front of a judge and jury," I said.

"Only this morning I saw Oswald," she pursued. "He really did not seem a bit upset about anything."

To me that didn't prove a thing. If Oswald thought he was introducing some raw bookkeeping in the name of charity, why would he be upset?

"We must allow for McGee's dramatic instinct," said Max, trying to kid himself. "I'm fairly sure, when we see the boy, he will straighten out every kink."

"Then we want to see him mighty soon."

"Yes, Jim. For McGee thinks that if Oswald doesn't show up bright and early tomorrow morning, there will be a warrant sworn out for him. He's got some of the committee people sore. And McGee can't soothe 'em, he says." Max depicted the element of danger with unmistakable anxiety.

Pacing the floor, I stopped to apologize to Marcia. "We'll have to postpone the farce proposition, if you don't mind," I said. She straightway joined Max and me in our imitation of large zoo pets, fidgeting about my room and making it clear that she wanted all our energies devoted to Oswald's defense or rescue.

"I now remember, he did seem a little excited," said she. "This morning, I mean, when he paid me for my author's half of the 'Jezebel' picture rights, thirty-seven hundred and fifty dollars, less ten per cent commission."

"He hasn't paid me for my half," Max exclaimed.

"Oh, now it is getting clearer," said I. "He has dug up an offer somewhere, and he's juggling the charity funds, trying to net himself a private profit." For the first time

in my life I regretted the distance separating me from Alice, his mother. If I might tell her——

"I'd better call McGee back," said Max.

"Yes, and ask him to run up here right away if he can. Tell him that I'll personally protect the committee."

"Good old Jim! I knew you'd stand by the boy. We can send them a certified check tomorrow morning, and then lie our two heads off to prevent any scandal spreading."

"Don't put me down as sentimental in this," I barked back. Marcia began to giggle nervously. "Why, folks, I'm not even friendly. But if this is really a case of grand larceny, do you think I want to have the boy's mother sobbing at my heels for five years while Oswald serves out his sentence?"

"No matter, Jim, just so the committee hears from McGee that we're covering up any shortage they think exists, till Oswald masters arithmetic."

"You're simply splendid, both of you," said Marcia.

Max stood still, and I thought he was about to sing, he looked so pleased. "Shall I do the phoning?" I asked with more tact than the occasion deserved.

"No, I'll attend to it," said he. And after facing in several directions, he rallied himself and made for the door.

"Tell McGee, too," said I, "that any of the committee who ache to swear out a warrant tomorrow should come to my office, where all the best swearing about Oswald will be done from now on."

It was Marcia's suggestion that I send Rodgers and the car to try and locate my receding step-nephew. Oswald and my chauffeur were intimately acquainted, and Rodgers might know where Oswald would be likely to lurk.

I CAN remember easier waits than the half hour that followed. We three might as well have sat in the dark and moaned at each other. Then Rodgers returned, and Oswald came with him.

In manner he was perhaps no more condescending than the head of a large bank. But I thought I detected a degree of pallor unwarranted by his brisk ride or the fine evening.

I wanted Rodgers out of the way before I opened up on Alice's lamb. But as the chauffeur withdrew, McGee arrived.

He shook hands heartily with Marcia and Max and me. Then he went and stood beside Oswald, whose brazen grin sagged a little at the corners, and he dropped one hand crisply on the lad's shoulder. Oswald jumped.

McGee, you see, was in uniform and looked a good deal like an officer of the law.

"Behave, Jack. What have you been stirring up about me?" Oswald said. "I can square that fool committee by—by five o'clock tomorrow. I promise."

"That'll be too late," McGee shouted fiercely. Marcia's presence seemed not to disconcert him, since he had acted a corrupt Oriental in her play.

"Kid, come clean," he ordered. His grip on Oswald's shoulder tightened, and I hoped he would supply that long felt want and shake my step-relative till his young teeth rattled.

"Do you really mean, the committee doesn't trust me, Jack?" Oswald mingled surprise with pity and disdain.

"They do not. Come clean," Mc-

Gee commanded. "If you don't want to be disgraced."

Oswald's dignity began to break up. "Pshaw!" said he, but his lip trembled. "Those others have been jealous of you and me, Jack, and simply because we were both really at the fire and began the work of rescue which this benefit business completes."

"How completes — if you don't turn over the money? Leave me and jealousy out of this. Where's the balance due?"

"Balance due," Oswald repeated, grasping at the straw, which was a phrase he recognized. "Why, say, my whole statement as treasurer is right here."

From a vest pocket he took out a notebook of the smallest known size, which looked as though it might contain a gift of ten two-cent stamps. "And I mean to have my books audited by a reputable firm of public accountants," he added more airily.

"Since when did auditors use microscopes?" I said.

"Come on, now, answer my question, kid. Where's all the rest of the benefit cash?" McGee shouted again.

"Jack, do you know, you ought to play a prosecuting attorney part," Oswald recommended, attempting a shrewd diversion. But McGee's talents were no mystery to himself. He said he did know that, and he continued to demand an explicit answer to his ringing question.

"Well, I'll have whatever is due tomorrow," Oswald confessed, "or I'll put the man who owes it to me in jail."

"Tomorrow, don't you understand, he'll have to come to jail to pay it to you," said I. "Who is this sudden man? Why invent a scapegoat at the last minute?"

"He's no invention, Uncle Jim. I can't reveal his name, though; it'd be a breach of trust."

"What about this benefit committee and a breach of trust?"

"That's different," said Oswald stoutly. "You heard Jack say they don't trust me. So where's my breach?"

For a moment his blandness silenced us. Visibly he began to revive, to strut a bit and gain something of his usual exasperating composure. Max told him we might help him collect. He declined both help and advice.

"Perhaps it's a gamble, but nothing dishonest," he said. "I ought to run all the risks by myself."

"If you could, we'd let you," said I.

"Yes, boy, think of disgracing your uncle," McGee put in, trying a new histrionic note. "And think of your mother's disgrace, too. Think of all our fine plans."

"This is the real beginning of them," Oswald said.

"Your getting set for trial?"

"But I'm not even arrested yet——"

"You will be, don't worry."

"I'm not worrying," Oswald said, but he grew paler than ever, and his voice quavered, too, I thought. "I admit I had to juggle the funds a little. Naturally," he added, "it takes time to turn over all the receipts of such a big affair as Sunday night's, outside contributions, program profits, and all that, don't you see?"

"Oh, I see, kid. You haven't the money and you're not sure when you can get it. You are trembling——"

"It's chilly," Oswald apologized.

"—trembling on the brink—of disaster!" McGee was emotional, he was moving. I'd had no idea his voice was so good.

"This is serious. Please stop acting," I had to implore him.

"Then I can act, do you think, Mr. Kirke?" he cried.

"Yes, so it seems, if you have to."

"Then, why then——"

"Yes—yes," I agreed impatiently.

"Yes," said Max. "We'll remember you, Jack, when we start casting any new shows."

"Say, that's great!" the fireman exclaimed. Once more he shook hands with Marcia and Max and me.

Oswald attempted to clap him on the back and add an appropriate word. McGee wheeled and grasped Alice's son by both arms, and though he still did not shake him, it seemed that Oswald quivered from some impact.

"No, listen, you," McGee said bluntly, "your uncle's too white a man to be bothered by anything queer or shady. I'm responsible for you. I put you in on this. But I'd never have let you ride to that fire if I'd known it was a worker."

Oswald ventured to protest, opening his mouth and making one small, unintelligible sound. "Shut up!" snapped McGee, almost prematurely. "The department will attend to your case."

"Not yet—the police—" Max exclaimed.

"No, sir, the fire department," McGee explained. He addressed himself again to Oswald with vehemence and startling exaggeration. "I'm taking you down to the house right now. You'll talk, believe me. We'll get out the pumper and turn a high pressure stream on you. That'll clear your mind and bring you to your senses."

Oswald was a ghastly shade of blue. "But I can't swim," he whimpered. McGee's grip kept him from kneeling to pray!

"Then tell us all of the truth, here and now."

He opened his mouth, gulped, and this time a confession in full sprang forth. "Save me, Uncle Jim," he said. "It was only like this. The tenement house which was burned was owned by a rich Italian, Ettore Salvinore, a big slums' landlord and a bootlegger of prominence, too. Probably it was a still of his that exploded. The fire marshal's trying to prove it on him.

"However, many of the tenants, who were grateful to Jack for those he rescued, came around to thank him in person—never guessing his brutal nature," he threw in.

"All of these tenants talked very freely against their hard landlord, Salvinore. Jack mentioned some things they said. And as I was out seeking contributions for the benefit, I hunted up Salvinore and mentioned them to him. Well, when he knew what I was wise to, he became very eager to have me feel friendly."

"Blackmail!" McGee interrupted in the voice of Edwin Forrest. "Even in a good cause——"

"Wait, please," said Oswald. "If I seem to have taken advantage of Salvinore's guilty conscience, it's because of my religious upbringing. I have known what it means to be publicly accused, and I put my information at Salvinore's disposal. He was grateful. For all of his tenements are now being investigated and he fears trouble at any moment.

"He gave me a large contribution for the benefit. That practically amounted to an ad for his big heart. I've kept on remembering things the excited tenants told Jack, and Salvinore has decided he'd enjoy a trip to California.

"I suggested to him that while there he might easily pay his ex-

penses by reselling the picture rights of our hit, the 'Jezebel.' He agreed almost at once.

"I'm only charging him fifteen thousand dollars. I'll allow the benefit ten, and make but five for myself. Thus, through my enterprise, the benefit clears an extra twenty-five hundred. But, so far, Salvinore has paid me just two thousand down, and that's why I can't turn over my receipts to the committee till this deal has gone through completely."

"But you've only paid Marcia," said Max. "Then you're only short the difference between two thousand and what she received from you today?"

"But I have to pay you, too," Oswald replied.

"You asked me to save you," I put in. "And I will."

"Thanks a lot, Uncle Jim." He felt half restored, and turned a scornful shoulder toward his angry friend, McGee.

"Perhaps I'm doing my worst in diverting you from a prison," said I. "But here goes. Even if this Salvinore is badly cornered, you aren't required by law or religion to try trimming him, too.

"My check in the morning will make good to the benefit committee. You can see Salvinore and give back his two thousand downbinder. You have paid Miss Wayne. Hereafter, Max and I will control all further rights in the lamented 'Jezebel.' And after I pay the committee, I'll expect to be reimbursed by you as far as you are able. An accountant will be engaged to determine that."

I turned away to let his fate sink in. Marcia Wayne and McGee and even Max showed a grim approval of my remedy. Then, fuming and furious, Oswald came and confronted me, using his mother's voice and his grandmother's habit of mind. "So that's how you'd save me?"

"Yes. Merely from arrest and conviction. I didn't agree to throw in a motor or a handsome annuity."

"I might have known you'd take advantage of me," he raged, "if I put myself in your power."

I hoped he would strike at me. He obviously wanted to. But perhaps he suspected my eagerness to add the spanking that would pain and humiliate him.

"As for my miserable job with you, Uncle Jim," he sneered, "consider that I have resigned, as of this date."

"Oh, no, you haven't. You'll be fired when I'm through with you," I told him. "You can easily forget the seriousness of this scrape. You can hate me for helping you. But you will stick around as long as a dollar is due."

His future prospect appeared to appall him. "I suppose I'll have to be your slave for years," he mourned. "What chance have I got, if it's bookkeeping?"

VII

NEXT day at 1:30 I was joining Marcia and Max for luncheon, when Oswald reappeared, threading his way across the crowded hotel dining-room without evidence of malice or signs of recent rescue from a charge of theft.

"Greetings!" he cried to us, and accepted the fourth chair at our table as if summoned by an invitation as cordial as himself. "All is forgiven," he added. But when he picked up a menu I interfered.

"You'll starve if you sit here," said I, having seen many more delicate hints bounce off of his effrontery. "What is the purpose of this interview?"

"Don't stay surly, Uncle Jim," he dared to retort. "I've forgiven you

for your clumsy help. And I am here now to do you and Friend Max a corking favor, believe me."

"What about?" Max asked, his once resolute affection for Alice's prodigy having almost wasted away.

"You both know how the motion picture producing firms are—always in the market for rumors, loving to outbid one another and be dramatic? None of 'em wanted our 'Jezebel' till I started a big sales rumor, on account of my dicker with poor Salvinore."

He continued, in awe of himself. "And now, why, I've an offer for it from Triumph Pictures. Price? Just thirty thousand dollars. I suppose you won't let me in on anything but the commission. However, if you accept——"

"Jim, let's grab it," Max exclaimed. "This is my luckiest day. Let the boy take his ten per cent. It's one time he seems to have worked for it."

"We ought to split ours three ways," I said. "It's not fair to freeze out the author with that pitiful thirty-seven hundred and fifty, less commission, is it?"

Max beamed foolishly. And Marcia said: "How nice you are! It is a lucky day. I believe I'll get that cute red roadster."

"Then write us all hits, to take care of the upkeep."

"I'll be taking care of the upkeep," Max announced. His florid gesture now brought to my attention the diamond solitaire sparkling upon Marcia's left hand.

I quickly congratulated them both. So did Oswald, and very eloquently. Then, strangely subsiding, he began laboriously to figure with a pencil on the back of a menu card.

"Yes, it's a real lucky day," he added. "After a cut to Jack McGee, I'll make nearly five thousand myself."

He saw me start to object, and hurried on, "I forgot to tell you. Poor Salvinore's been indicted after all, and has run away to Canada, it seems. He wired me from Buffalo, begging me to keep quiet forever and keep the two thousand dollars. In the fall, Uncle Jim, I can afford to strike out for myself."

"Why the gross delay of four months?" I argued.

"But aren't we pals again? I'd never desert you now, right in the dull season, and with Max only thinking of his honeymoon," he said. "Besides, I know there are still a few things I can learn."

"There are?" we murmured together.

"Yes. I've got to learn all about bookkeeping."

"If you ever do," said Max, "you'll find it a big handicap."

Broken Pieces

By NEIL MORAN

YOU may have heard of William J. Blackstone if you keep up with the news, and the chances are you do. And you may recall that he was that well known lawyer who, time and again, distinguished himself before the criminal bar. He was known as a breaker of men.

Those cases that crept into the newspapers were applauded and Blackstone was commended for his skill.

But there were other cases that the press never heard about, and these were Blackstone's personal cases dealing with his grievances, his hates, and his avowed purpose of breaking men.

He was ruthless, this fellow, when he started out to get his man. He was unscrupulous. And so he often stooped to underhand tactics. But with his knowledge of the law and his uncanny way of doing things, he always managed to cover up his tracks and accomplish his ends.

He was an influential lawyer. More than that, he was a power among an influential circle of friends. He knew how to pull wires, how to move, and his victim, baited, often walked into the trap.

Now, in his fortieth year, Blackstone fell in love with a girl. She had heard of his achievements, but she didn't know of the dirty games he had often played. And because she was susceptible to men who do big things, she admired Blackstone and respected him as well.

He was to her a masterful man, the acme of perfection in every way. He was tall, heavily built, with bushy eyebrows and curly hair, and, while far from good-looking, he had personality that stood out.

But one, a little sharper in studying human nature than Lois Langley, would also have seen that while

he had personality there was something about him that repelled.

Blinded to this and believing that she was in love, Lois Langley only saw her ideal of a man.

And then another man came along —Cleghorn—and a triangle arose.

Cleghorn, also, was a lawyer. But he was different from Blackstone in every way. He was several years younger and not so aggressive, but he had a quiet reserve that Blackstone lacked. He was a fairly successful lawyer. But he was not in Blackstone's class.

And yet it was not at all strange that he should have been more brilliant than Blackstone, even though he had never received his big chance.

THE night they sighted the cabin on the hill, they were thankful for signs of habitation at last. They had got lost in the mountainous region and had been walking for hours. Then darkness had closed in on them, and just when they were beginning to despair Blackstone held up his hand.

"Isn't that a cabin?" he said, pointing. "A cabin up there? There's a light, and smoke seems to be curling from the chimney."

With his hand, Cleghorn shaded his eyes.

"A cabin," he said, "and we're safe at last. Let's make for it and see if we can't be guided out of this mess."

They started to ascend, each man offering the girl his arm. And then, suddenly, Blackstone stooped down and picked up a stick.

"Cleghorn," he said, "can you break that?"

The younger lawyer laughed.

"What's the point?" he asked, grinning.

"Simply that I wonder if you can break that stick."

Cleghorn took it, tried to break it and handed it back.

"I cannot," he admitted. "It's very strong wood."

"Watch!" said Blackstone, and the wood splintered in his hand.

This, to Cleghorn, was a silly exhibition before the eyes of a girl. It was like a schoolboy who would say to his friend, "Johnny, can you jump over that fence?"

But there was more than that to it. Blackstone knew.

There was something destructive in his make-up. It went back to boyhood days when he broke the back of a cat. He accomplished it with a baseball bat. There was also the time when he squeezed a bird in his hand, to say nothing of the times—far less serious—when he broke his toys and ruined his father's watch by putting it on a stone and cracking it with a stick.

The breaking instinct was in him. So it was not at all unnatural that, when he grew up, this desire grew and took another outlet—the breaking of men.

Cats, birds and inanimate things had ceased to interest him. He now turned to more interesting prey.

This mean streak in him developed so that men who crossed him often felt his wrath. And often, to be sure, there were men he couldn't reach. But those he could knew that Blackstone was after them, and sooner or later they went down.

He had to have his openings and when he got them he played his game. And this was the man that Lois Langley believed she loved.

Yet, as they climbed the hill to that friendly looking cabin at the top, a little doubt arose in her mind as she looked at the older man. It was this doubt that so often prevented her from saying "Yes."

Time and again Blackstone had proposed to her. She just wanted a

little more time. And he had given it willingly, believing he had won. But this doubt, this intuition, call it what you will, often puzzled and disturbed her and so she had never given in.

Now, as she felt it, she looked at the other man. Cleghorn was walking slowly, steadily, a smile on his lips. He was more attractive than Blackstone, and Lois Langley felt a thrill. There was something romantic about Cleghorn that seemed to go with the setting here.

And yet he was only Cleghorn, a lawyer, one of the many, while Blackstone was the man who had carved a noteworthy career.

As they drew near the cabin her speculations fled. She stopped, startled, as if she had seen something to dread. Cleghorn and Blackstone stopped with her and Blackstone squeezed her arm.

"Don't be afraid," he said, sensing her nervousness. "It's only a man."

"But, great Pete!" said Cleghorn. "Look at his size!"

The man standing in front of the cabin, watching them as curiously as they did him, was six and a half feet tall. He was so massive he looked like a giant. His head was shaggy and small eyes glimmered under bushy brows.

"I say," said Blackstone, as they drew nearer, "can you tell us where we are? We are three travelers—lost. Can you help us out?"

The man didn't speak, but they saw, as they came closer, that he was watching them with intent eyes.

"I don't like his looks," Lois whispered. "I think——"

"Don't be foolish," said Blackstone. "I'll take care of this lad."

He stepped forward boldly and held out his hand.

"My name is Blackstone," he said. "I'm an attorney from New York City. These are my friends, Miss Langley and Mr. Cleghorn. We shall be very much indebted to you if you will guide us out of this place. And, of course, we shall compensate you for your service. Do you understand?"

Evidently the man did not. He stood staring at Blackstone, and then the lawyer suddenly drew back.

"I'm hanged!" he muttered. "A giant with the mind of a child!"

He changed his line of procedure.

"Lost," he said. "Lost. Two men. One woman. Lost. We want to go in. Get something to eat. Rest. Talk over how we get out of here. You help us. We're your friends. See? Here is money. You can use money."

Blackstone held up a ten dollar bill in his hand.

"He thinks he's talking to an Indian," whispered Cleghorn to Lois, as he began to enjoy the simple phrases with which Blackstone was trying to make himself clear.

"Lost?" said the big man, and it sounded like the voice of a child and then again like the voice of a weary, old man.

"Yes, lost," said Blackstone. "Don't you ever have any people come this way?"

"Not often," said the child-man. "Sometimes, months go by, I see no one at all. You scare me. Now I see you all right."

Blackstone threw back his head and laughed.

"Why, we frightened the little fellow!" he said. "Think of that!"

He was master of the situation and knew how to proceed.

"Well, what's your name?" he asked kindly. "You know ours."

The big man scratched his head.

"John," he said. "John Humbert."

"John Humbug?" said Blackstone.

"I wish he wouldn't guy him," Cleghorn whispered in Lois' ear.

"No, John Humbert. You come in.

I treat you fine. I don't like people, but I understand."

"Well, we're understood," said Blackstone, winking over his shoulder. "Come on."

THEY entered the cabin and John Humbert closed the door. Now they were better able to see him. He stood before them in the light of the lamp.

They had got a fair idea of his size but now they were able to study his face. It was full and had no beard on it, but a razor nearby indicated that John Humbert shaved.

His forehead was low. And, above this, shaggy hair hung, hair that had been touched by gray even though John Humbert was not an old man. He was thirty-three, yet there was a childlike simplicity about him that went to Lois' heart. Cleghorn felt it, too. But it was this very quality that made Blackstone laugh.

It was this that gave Blackstone nothing to fear. He knew how to handle this man. At first he hadn't been so sure, and his boldness had been inspired by the presence of Lois. But now he had John Humbert in the palm of his hand.

"Well, John," he said, "you've got a nice little place here. "It's a little crude but a fellow like you shouldn't mind that."

"No," said Humbert, looking around the cabin and grinning foolishly, "it is my home."

"And there's no place like home," said Blackstone gaily. "John, did you ever hear that song, 'Home, Sweet Home'?"

It was badinage, but John Humbert didn't get it. Instead, his eyes lighted up.

"Yes, yes!" he said quickly, and it was like a double hiss that came from his mouth. "See," he said, pointing, "there is my music box. And I have but one song."

He turned and poked Blackstone in the side gleefully and Blackstone jumped. "And it is 'Home, Sweet Home'!" he cackled. "The only record I have."

Blackstone looked at him in amazement and then he burst into a laugh.

"The only record, John?" he said, bewildered. "My, how provokingly modern you are!"

"How you mean?" asked John Humbert sheepishly.

Cleghorn nodded his head for Blackstone to desist, but Blackstone continued: "Why, you're way ahead of the times. I can see that we'll have to go some to keep up with your speed."

John Humbert didn't understand this, but he did know one thing: he didn't like this man. He might have the mind of a child, but he knew when fire was near.

He was on his guard. Yet neither by word nor sign did he show his displeasure. He turned and looked at Lois and the other man.

In one fleeting glimpse he had seen enough to tell him that these two he liked. He had felt it as they entered the room. And now he saw in their eyes sympathy and understanding that didn't pass unnoticed in his mind.

"After," he said, turning back to Blackstone, "I will play song for you. First, you will eat?"

"Well, whatever you've got, John," said Blackstone gaily, as Humbert hurried into another room.

"Don't fool him," Lois whispered to Blackstone. "He seems so dense."

"Why, I was only having a little fun with him," said Blackstone.

"Yes, I know," said Cleghorn, "but it's just as well to make him feel that he's all right."

John Humbert returned presently with some broken dishes and cook-

ing utensils, and these he placed on a chair.

"Sit down," he said cordially. "Here, miss, you sit on this chair. You two must use boxes. I haven't much furniture here."

"It's all right, John," said Blackstone. "You've got a knockout of a place. But tell me, what is a big, strong man like you doing in these mountains? Why, a handsome devil like you ought to be on the stage!"

Humbert blinked as if it was beyond his comprehension, and Cleghorn signaled with his eyes. But Blackstone went right on.

"Disappointed in love, John, or something like that? Cut yourself off from the rest of the world?"

John Humbert looked at the dishes and utensils in his arms.

"I have lived here all my life," he said. "My father, mother, dead. This has been my only home. I don't know your ways."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Lois. "Your father and mother are dead?"

John Humbert knew the good heart even though he didn't know the ways of men.

"Yes," he said. "Some people I know. Miles away. Sometimes they come see me. Sometimes I go see them. They very kind to me. I very kind to them. They give me that book there." He pointed to a book on the chair.

Blackstone picked it up. It was a child's book with pictures in it.

"My, what deep reading you go in for," he said. "I suppose you know all about this, John."

"I like to look at pictures. But I cannot read."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Lois. But John Humbert didn't hear.

HE HAD put down the dishes and utensils on a bed. The others sat watching him, interested in his next move.

For a moment he seemed lost in thought. Then he walked over to a shelf and took down a box. Lois' curiosity was growing. She saw a cylinder of wax appear in his hand.

"Do you know what this is?" he said, turning.

"Yes, it's a record!" she cried.

"No, it's a song!"

"Well, it's a record that plays a song," said Blackstone. "Doesn't it go on that old machine?"

He pointed to an old-fashioned phonograph and John Humbert nodded his head.

"Yes," he said, "it goes on there. And it plays very good music. You will see. It is my only song." And he walked over and put the record on.

Lois, Cleghorn and Blackstone looked up with an expectant air. A song might break the monotony. But as "Home, Sweet Home" started to play, Blackstone looked at Lois in despair.

The record was cracked and the machine squeaked. Almost any second, Lois expected both to fall to pieces at her feet. But John Humbert stood as one entranced. He liked that music. There was no doubt of that.

"Isn't this terrible?" Blackstone whispered.

"Be quiet," said Lois. "Pretend it's all right."

The last note ended and John Humbert took the record off.

"Later," he said, "I will play it again. But first you will want to eat."

"Yes," said Blackstone. "And how about getting out of here tonight?"

John Humbert looked at him with his brooding eyes.

"Night not good to travel the mountains," he announced. "Daylight much better. Then sun. If you will wait until morning, I will lead you out. Plenty of room here."

"Oh, then you'll put us up for the night?" said Blackstone. "Well, what do you say?"

Lois and Cleghorn nodded assent.

"And it's very kind of you," said Lois. "And we appreciate it very much."

John Humbert smiled.

"Then I will play my song for you," he said, as if to show her that he could be grateful, too.

And he walked over and put the record on.

"It's a very good song," he said. "You will like it." And he said it just as if they hadn't heard it before.

"The fellow's a monomaniac!" Blackstone muttered.

"Humor him," whispered Lois in the lawyer's ear.

"Humor him?" said Blackstone. "Why, if you keep on encouraging him, he'll be playing the song all night!"

Around midnight, Blackstone expressed a desire to turn in.

"How are we going to arrange it, John?" he said. "There are four of us here."

"And three rooms. Come, I will show you."

He led them to the rear and pointed to a rude cot.

"For the lady," he said. "I have skins and coverings for us all. The lady will sleep here and she can close and lock her door. And the two men can sleep in this next room, and they can close and lock the door. I will throw myself down in the big room."

"Why do you say we can close and lock the doors?" Blackstone asked.

"Because there are locks on them," said John Humbert simply as he turned away.

"Do you think we can trust this fellow?" whispered Blackstone.

"Yes," said Lois. "I trust the man."

"I, too," said Cleghorn. "I don't think we have anything to fear."

THEY went to bed and John Humbert blew out the light. Shuffling across the room, he stopped by the window. Stars shone overhead. John Humbert wondered how far they were away. Some nights they seemed nearer than on others. And some nights, some of them seemed very near.

In fact, one night one of the stars seemed so near that he took a lantern and went out and walked toward it. But the more he walked the farther away the star seemed to be. So he gave it up, came home and never went after stars again. But almost every night he sat at the window looking above. Some nights the stars shone brightly. And then there were nights when the stars weren't there. Nights had come and gone, nights with stars, and nights with snow and rain, and nights when thunder rumbled and lightning filled the sky.

A wonderful world, this, in which he lived, a wonderful universe in which the world sped. But John Humbert didn't know about these things. All he knew was that stars were above, as were the moon and the sun, and that the seasons changed.

It was all a puzzle to him, but he was contented and his soul was at peace. He had a vague notion about a God who was watching over him.

So he curled himself up at the window and sighed happily as he gazed out.

This night the stars were not there. Nothing but a black void. A sense of loneliness oppressed him. Where was the sun? The sun was so bright and cheerful and warm! The sun made him happy and glad he was alive. Where did the sun go, anyway, and how did it return?

He sprang up quickly. The sun! Where did the sun go?

He didn't understand the solar system, and couldn't have understood it even if he had had it explained. But he did know that he had seen the stars and the sun and the moon; that the sun came and warmed him and then went away.

He stole to the window again and gazed. A star seemed to come out and blink at him and John Humbert smiled. Then, when he looked again, the star was gone. The feeling of loneliness swept over him once more. The silence was awful to endure. But there was the music, the one thing that stilled his alarm.

He ran over, suddenly, and put the record on. His hand touched something and the music started to play. "Home, Sweet Home" filled the room.

Blackstone, roused from a deep sleep, sat on the edge of the cot and swore.

"This is too much," he growled. "I say, Cleghorn, how can you sleep with that noise going on?"

Cleghorn didn't budge. Eyes closed, mouth pursed, snores and a whistling sound issued from his lips.

"Well, if you can sleep through it, I can't!" And Blackstone rushed out of the room, bent on giving John Humbert a piece of his mind.

He stopped as he entered the next room. There stood John Humbert, foot tapping the floor. Hand over his breast, face uplifted, he didn't hear Blackstone enter the room.

And then Blackstone walked over hurriedly and spun him around.

"Shut it off, man!" he said. "Don't you ever sleep? How do you think we can sleep with that——"

John Humbert stared at him in amazement.

"Is it not beautiful?" he asked.

"No!" said Blackstone angrily, "it sounds like a tin pan!"

Obediently, John Humbert went over and took off the record, and Blackstone went back to bed.

He didn't play the record again, but sat for hours by the window, looking for stars. Then a heaviness came over him and he slept.

It was hours later when he awoke. Sunbeams filled the room. He got up, stretched, and looked through the window at the east. There was the sun, that mysterious sun. It made John Humbert feel better. He started to hum as he crossed the room, took down some cans from a shelf and looked over the provisions he had to offer his guests.

BREAKFAST was ready for them when they appeared. Lois was the first to arrive.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning," said John Humbert. "I hope you slept well."

"Very," said Lois. "Oh, do let me help you! I can cook."

"No," said John Humbert, trying to show her that he appreciated the offer, but that he was competent to act as host, "everything is prepared, you see. We have only to wait for the men, and then we shall get an early start."

The men appeared, Cleghorn looking refreshed, and Blackstone as if he had been tortured by horrible dreams.

"Well, it won't be much longer now," he announced, "before we're out of this place. I say, Johnny, what are you doing, scrambling eggs?"

John Humbert didn't speak. With his back to Blackstone, he ignored him and went on sharpening a knife.

"He's sore at me," Blackstone whispered to Cleghorn. "I had to come out during the night and tell him to stop playing that foolish song. Did you hear it?"

Cleghorn nodded his head.

"Yes, it woke me up after you left, but I tried to understand. You're dealing with a—well, you know what I don't want to say."

Blackstone nodded and drew up a chair.

"Sit down, Lois," he said. "How did you sleep?"

"Very well."

"Hear anything to disturb you in the night?"

"Nothing," she told him, and he leaned over and whispered what had roused him from bed.

"I wish you would try to be a little patient with him," she admonished. "He's a very——"

"Don't say it," said Blackstone. "I know what you mean. But if I don't get out of this place, I'm going to commit murder." and he drew himself up and swaggered across the room.

Cleghorn looked at him. Blackstone was a big man. And, while John Humbert was five or six inches taller, Cleghorn knew that John Humbert didn't have Blackstone's strength.

John Humbert was a mountain of flesh, but he was soft. But Blackstone was hard and muscular and one drive from his powerful arm would have sent John Humbert to the floor.

Cleghorn was thinking: "The sooner we have breakfast and get out of here the better. There's battle in Blackstone's eyes."

Blackstone ate breakfast, not trying to conceal his contempt. He ordered John Humbert around.

Lois, watching, found that Blackstone was going down in her eyes. She was beginning to see the real man. Here was a bully, sure of his ground, master of the premises that belonged to another man.

"Won't you try to be a little kind to him?" she whispered, leaning over. "After all he's a gentleman and he's done us a good turn."

"A gentleman?" said Blackstone in amazement. "Do you call him a gentleman?"

"You know what I mean. One doesn't have to be cultured and polished to earn the right to that name."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Blackstone. "Cleghorn, have you heard this?"

Cleghorn had heard, but he turned a deaf ear. He was tired of Blackstone's insolent ways.

John Humbert, ever ready to help the two who were kind to him, was obliged to help their friend also. So he carried over dishes, laid them on the crude table and looked at Blackstone with frightened eyes.

He was afraid of Blackstone and Blackstone knew it.

It made Blackstone's chest swell. It was his boast that he had never been afraid of man or beast. And now he rapped on the table, ordering John Humbert to be quick.

"Don't do that!" said Lois.

"I will if I want to. That idiot woke me up from my sleep."

Both Lois and Cleghorn looked distressed, but they also looked at John Humbert with kind eyes. They wanted him to understand. And he did. He came forward gratefully, coffee pot in hand.

As he poured more coffee into Lois' cup, some of it spilled on Blackstone's hand.

Blackstone sprang up. John Humbert backed away from him and started like a frightened deer.

"Oh, sit down!" said Cleghorn.

"I won't," said Blackstone. "I'll wait outside."

HE WENT and everyone was glad of that. Lois and Cleghorn smiled into each other's eyes. And in that

moment Lois Langley knew that it was Cleghorn she loved.

She was trying to think how she could ever have been attracted to Blackstone, when John Humbert touched her arm. He was offering her something that brought a smile to her lips.

"For you," he said and he placed his picture book in her hands.

Lois took it and looked up into his face.

"Oh, I appreciate it," she said. "But I couldn't take it from you."

"I don't need it," said John Humbert. "I have my song." And he looked at the machine and the old broken record as a boy might look at his toys.

"Take it," whispered Cleghorn. And Lois put the book in her lap.

"Thank you," she said. "I'll always keep this."

"And if you ever need a friend, John," said Cleghorn, "you can reach me here." He took a card out of his case and handed it across.

"And I am going to send you some things," said Lois. "What would you like?"

"Nothing," said John Humbert. "What could I use?"

Lois thought of men and women she knew who wanted so much. A strange world. A strange man. Here, alone in the mountains, he was at peace. And then a cloud passed over the setting as Blackstone appeared.

"How much longer are you going to be?" he demanded. "I'm aching to get out of here."

Lois and Cleghorn arose and offered John Humbert their hands.

"Good-by, John Humbert," said Lois, "and thank you very much."

"Good-by, miss." And he trembled as he looked at Blackstone standing near the door.

"Good-by, John," said Cleghorn.

"Good-by, my friend."

Two hands met and Blackstone looked on in disgust.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he muttered. "They're making the fellow think he's a king!"

Lois and Cleghorn crossed the room and Blackstone, watching them, was greatly perturbed. He seemed to understand instinctively that an understanding had come up between them. In that second he seemed to realize that Cleghorn had won the girl.

It didn't make him feel any better. He left the porch, on the pretext of going into his room to get something that he had forgotten, and when he came out Lois and Cleghorn had started on. Through a window he could see them walking down the hill arm in arm.

"Now," said Blackstone, "I'll settle with you!"

John Humbert looked at him with startled eyes.

"Oh, don't alarm yourself," said Blackstone. "I mean no harm. You're as soft as pudding and if I hit you, you'd squash. But I have a way of settling my debts and I know what to do. I'm a breaker of men, John Humbert. Do you know what that means?"

John Humbert blinked, evidently at a loss.

"I've broken men," said Blackstone, "and what would you say if I broke that piece of wax?"

He sprang over suddenly and took the record.

"No, no!" John Humbert protested. "You mustn't do that! Give it back! That is my song!"

"A song, yes. And you certainly made it an annoying one. Some men have been hard to break, but see how easy it would be to break this. Why, it's the easiest thing I've ever broken!" laughed Black-

stone as the wax crumbled in his hand.

John Humbert looked at him in consternation. The color went out of his face. Dazed, he stood trying ing to understand this calamity that had come into his life. His song was gone. And nights when the stars were not shining brightly and loneliness oppressed him——

A savage cry broke from his lips. He stood trembling, looking at Blackstone with wild eyes.

"You have broken my song!" he cried. "You have broken my song!"

Blackstone looked at him and started to back toward the wall.

"Stand aside," he cried, "and let me pass!"

"You have broken my song!"

"Get out of my way, man, and let me pass!"

"No, no, you have broken my song!"

Like the record, over and over fell that insistent line. It got on Blackstone's nerves. He looked toward the door, measured the giant who was barring his way and turned and looked at the opened windows. Then his old-time resourcefulness came into play.

"John," he said, "be sensible. I didn't mean to——"

"No, no, you have broken my song!"

Up and down John Humbert jumped, and the walls shook.

Blackstone wet his lips.

"John," he said, "I'll send you a song. I'll send you a dozen. I'll——"

"No, no, you have broken my song!"

Again that line fell and its insistence was getting into Blackstone's brain. But it was what went with it that unnerved him. A big, hulking man whose eyes were wild.

The irony of it! John Humbert only wanted Blackstone to know that he had broken his song.

He was like a child crying out in distress; a child whose toy had been smashed.

"You have broken my song!"

Again it came and Blackstone turned. He was perilously close to the window. Out of the corner of his eye he got a glimpse of an abyss and as he realized his danger he threw up his hands.

"John," he cried, perspiration streaming down his forehead, "John, my God, man! Stop!"

For John Humbert had rushed. Meaning no harm, he had rushed to reiterate his woe. But the sudden movement sent Blackstone tumbling backward and, a second later, he disappeared below.

John Humbert stopped. For the moment he forgot about his song. He stood there trying to figure something out. And then it dawned on him. Blackstone was gone.

Creeping over to the window, John Humbert looked out. Far down he saw something that was neither rock nor dirt. But, like rock, it didn't move. It sent a thought percolating through his head.

Broken pieces. There were broken pieces on the floor.

He turned, and picked the pieces up. And he looked at them as if he couldn't fully understand. Then, as it came to him that his song was gone, he rolled over, clutching the pieces, and cried like a child.

He was talking incoherently over his broken treasure as Cleghorn appeared at the door.

"What's the matter, John?" called the lawyer. "Why haven't you come?"

"He broke my song!" said John Humbert, pointing a finger. "He broke my song!"

Dead Men Make No Music

By EDWINA LEVIN MACDONALD

A Five-Part Story—Conclusion

CHAPTER XXVIII

WAITING

THE rain was coming down in sheets when I awakened. The candles at the head and feet of the dead man burned low in their silver holders, and a dim gray light filled the room.

There was no fire and, though someone had covered me with a rug, a chill, like clammy hands, enveloped me. Louis had changed his clothes, but I was still in that foolish turquoise taffeta. I felt like a modern flapper in a Shakespearian tragedy.

The priest had gone—probably to bed, since he could not have returned to his house in this rain. John, too, was out. Louis paced up and down the floor. As I sat up, he said: "There's a fire in the dining-room, Miss Tarver. You must be chilled through. A hot breakfast will do you good."

"Has anybody sent up to see how Odollee is?"

"Yes. Doctor Blackman has been up to see her. She has a high fever and is delirious. Mrs. Gerodes is with her."

"Mrs. Gerodes? How did she get here?"

"Sanchez sent Sing Lu for her. It seems she has had some experience as a practical nurse."

"Why didn't you get one of the nuns?"

"There are only two and they have so much to do—teaching and nursing, too. We talked it over and Sanchez suggested Mrs. Gerodes. John wrote asking her. Doctor Blackman said Odollee should not be left alone. She might hurt herself in her delirium. The servants are all afraid to go up there since what happened about the light. That is, all excepting Sanchez, and, as she is practically the head of the house, she couldn't stay all the time."

"Why didn't you call me?" I cried.

"You've had considerable shock yourself. We felt even you might not like to be alone with her."

"Why didn't you move her downstairs?"

"We spoke of that, but Doctor Blackman thought she was better up there with plenty of fresh air. This has been a terrible experience for you, Miss Tarver."

"It has been more terrible for you," I said, going swiftly to him.

He held my hands in a breaking grasp, tried to speak, gulped and turned away. Sanchez, who was in the dining-room, insisted on my having a cup of coffee before I went upstairs, assuring me Odollee was asleep.

Doctor Fisher had left some powders for her. She had awakened in a high fever, raving, and Doctor Blackman, who had no medicine with him, had given her one of the powders. She was resting now.

A TARPAULIN had been stretched from one of the gables on the south to the roof of our apartment. Of heavy canvas with side curtains, it furnished a dry passage from the stair to our door—made, I thought, to protect the dead man who had once occupied these rooms in his futile effort to escape the sinister ghost of Stone Gables.

This reminded me of our midnight visitor and that I had not verified my suspicions concerning the chimney.

Mrs. Gerodes opened the door for me.

Odollee was asleep.

I made a sign to Mrs. Gerodes and she extended her slate. We conversed about Odollee for a few minutes, then I changed my dress.

As I went out I stooped before the fireplace. A fire was burning, but by getting on my hands and knees I could look into the throat of the chimney.

"My God!" I heard myself say. "How did—it get in?"

The chimney proper was large enough for the passage of a man's body, but the opening above the blaze, where the smoke escaped into the yawning chimney, was fitted with a double fire-back which sloped forward so as to throw the heat into the room, and was not wide enough to permit the passage of a child's body.

For a long while I crouched there incapable of motion. When at last I stood up I found Mrs. Gerodes' eyes holding me in blank regard, as though she looked at me without seeing me.

All day, and for two days thereafter, the rain gushed out of the sky with no sign of let-up. Folks who know gray drizzling days must see these tropical downpours to know what rain is.

Everything moved like clockwork under the management of old Sanchez. Her energy and vitality were amazing. The servants flew at her bidding. Never abusive, she was harsh, positive, dictatorial. There was neither leniency nor meanness in her treatment of them.

I have not been an habitué of funeral parlors; but the silent orderliness of Stone Gables fulfilled my idea of them. No laughter, no song, swift-hushed figures moving about the big rooms, meals overcast by the gloom of present tragedy—nothing to do but wait for the end without in the least knowing what the end would be.

The men were preoccupied, the servants frightened. Mrs. Gerodes was as much company as a corpse. But she nursed Odollee with a tenderness utterly inconsistent with her grim mouth and bitter eyes, fighting ceaselessly against opiates, yielding

only when the fevered girl's raving became intolerable.

Frequently Odollee would call out sharply: "Father! Look out, Father!" Or again cried: "Oh, you devil!" Then she would fall to weeping.

Often Sanchez relieved Mrs. Gerodes, who would go downstairs usually to walk up and down the second-story hall for exercise, the rain making it impossible to get out.

Once, peeping into the drawing-room, I saw her standing beside Henri Meynard's bier. The sheet was turned back from his face, and it was no more deathlike than her own.

Her eyes were covered by her down-turned lids, but something in her pose, in her rigidly held body, put me in mind of Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter"—as if she were pilloried above Henri Meynard's dead face.

John suggested that I sleep downstairs; but I had been reduced to a blithering coward. I dared not be alone. So a couch was put in our bedroom for Mrs. Gerodes, and I slept on the divan in our sitting-room. Sometimes at night when my light was out, Mrs. Gerodes's eyes seemed to detach themselves from her face and float about in the darkness of my room demanding recognition.

Increasingly my conviction grew that I'd seen Mrs. Gerodes somewhere—under striking circumstances. That at any moment I would recollect her. I told myself it was foolish to keep trying to remember a face like that. I'd traveled since babyhood, seen so many people. . . . But this woman's eyes were fixed in my mind as the eyes of someone I'd known intimately.

And yet, how could I have forgotten her? Tall, emaciated, with neither beauty of face nor figure, she had that mysterious and compelling quality which makes stars on the stage—without which neither beauty nor talent will suffice—personality. Her features were majestic with no redeeming softness, pregnant with a repulsive fascination.

It was impossible that I was trying to connect her with some chance resemblance. She was the sort of person that nature doesn't try to reproduce. Often I would glance up to find her scrutinizing me. And it seemed that there was something sinister in the burning bitterness of her gaze. As if she dared and threatened me.

I presently discovered that I was under surveillance. Especially when in conversation with the Judge, Sanchez had a way of entering the room so noiselessly that we could not see her till she had almost passed out. And once I caught her behind the library portieres. She explained, as on the occasion when I'd seen the nun, that she "was feex dass certain."

The Judge finally noticed how she always had to "feex" something in our neighborhood—always prowling near us.

"That old savage is up to devilment," he said; "she's watching you or me, or both of us."

"It's me," I said.

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps both of us. We are the only wholly sane folk, outside of John, in this house."

"But why watch the same ones?"

"Afraid we'll find out something."

"Judge," I said, "do you think Henri Meynard was really murdered or that it could have been an accident? Surely it's impossible that a man's neck could be broken like that. The hands that did that thing were both dexterous and powerful.

I should say it was the work of an athlete and also one who was experienced in this form of crime."

"Why?"

"Its perfect timing. An instant's hesitation would have put Meynard on guard, and he himself was a powerful man. The very success of the crime depended on its instantaneousness. Of course, it had to be premeditated—done before the brain could register its warning."

"His brain must have registered a warning since he was reaching for his gun."

"Either he was reaching for it for another reason, or his hand merely rested in his pocket, and he fired spasmodically. I'm certain he had no warning. It couldn't have happened if he had. Why was he carrying a gun—while in conference with a girl?"

"God knows. But this much I know. That girl has sustained a terrible shock. Her cry, 'You fiend!' tells a great deal."

"Why do you think his sons want to drop the matter since you are so sure?"

"There's s o m e t h i n g they are afraid of."

"They are proud," I suggested, "and seem to have a terrible aversion to publicity."

"Pride is a civilized emotion and drops from us when primitive passions such as love and love's vengeance appear. But one emotion is stronger in the breast of man than these two—FEAR. There's something about all this which they are afraid an investigation will bring out."

"Do you think Odollee was Henri's daughter?"

"It seems the only way to account for her. She didn't surround herself when three years old with all that elaborate protective scheme, nor write those letters.

"Besides, that ring in her possession means something. On the other hand, the charges she brought against Henri are not consistent with her being his daughter."

"What charges?"

"Then you didn't know what was in that letter addressed to Henri?"

"No. I know almost nothing."

"Well, that letter in Henri's own handwriting accused him of killing his brother Pierre sixteen years ago; of deliberately murdering him. It denies his death by storm thirty years ago—and makes other diabolical charges."

"But Joe Tobias says he attended Pierre's funeral thirty years ago. Do you think he is lying?"

"If he is, all the islanders are liars. I've questioned dozens who attended Pierre's funeral. I don't think there's the slightest doubt that Henri killed his brother.

"But when did he do it? If thirty years ago, then Miss Odollee must be Henri's own daughter and those letters the result of his insanity. He may not, in sane moments, have known of her existence."

I recollected that night when Odollee came in breathing of Henri Meynard's own brand of perfume, and it seemed to me that here must be the answer. He knew and loved her at times. At other times he didn't. And she understood.

ON the second morning a big field wagon drove up to the house. It had an old-fashioned covering of canvas stretched over staves, like those one sees in pictures of pioneer days. Negro men in slickers, rubber hats and boots came in and carried the body of Henri Meynard from his house. Here, where there were no embalmers, folk must be buried in short order—regardless of weather.

The negroes rode in the wagon with the body. John and Louis fol-

lowed with the priest and Sanchez in a buggy. A car would have been useless in the bog of the forest.

Thus the Head of the House of Meynard was borne away to his splendid tomb. No weeping servants. No thronging subjects. No friends. No blanketing flowers. . . . His two sons and an old negress, who had hated him in life and loved him in death, his only mourners. Four negro roustabouts to stow him away.

I pitied his sons. The Judge and Doctor had offered to go along; but John refused to let them go in such weather.

Soon after the brothers and Sanchez returned the rain stopped with the same fierce temper it had displayed in its downpour—as if the heavens, having flung their entire burden upon the earth in one terrific flood, now closed their lids abruptly.

White clouds scudded across a serene blue sky. The sun came out, a pale gold radiance that transformed the dripping shrubbery to gleaming satin.

Rivulets of water rushed from the land toward the bay, as if in great haste to escape before the full fury of the sun arrived to burn them dry.

Odollee's fever left her on the third day after the funeral, and to my great joy she knew me, but turned her head away, as if too weary to talk.

That the Judge suspected her of being concerned in the murder of Henri Meynard, I knew. Whoever had taken the old man unaware from the back must have been seen by her.

The persistent determination of the brothers not to go into the matter, their absolute refusal to take any steps toward investigation, infuriated him. Louis stated positively and with what appeared to be sincere conviction that his father had been murdered by a supernatural power.

The Judge was peevish and would, I felt, have gone home; but he was waiting till Odollee should be well enough to talk.

He was, of course, handicapped by the disagreement of the two doctors as to how Henri Meynard probably came to his death.

What Doctor Blackman really thought, I had no idea. Openly he concurred in Louis' statement. He spent much time reading the diary of Pierre and studying Henri's handwriting.

With John's permission, he rummaged drawers, pulling out old letters and poring over them.

Meanwhile, Odollee lay like one having lost all interest in life. She asked no questions, rarely spoke. Sometimes she would press my hand, smile wanly, sigh and turn away, pretending to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIX

LIKE A STAR

FORTUNATELY for my sanity Mrs. Thompson came over. She had been terribly shocked and was grieved that she could not get over sooner, due to the ferry having stopped during the terrible flood. It had not made a trip since the morning when Mrs. Gerodes had been sent for.

Sanchez, who was with Odollee, said she was sleeping and would not let us disturb her. Mrs. Gerodes had gone home for clean clothes.

I was overjoyed to have a white woman who could speak English in the house. So sweet and sympathetic and charming was Mrs. Thompson.

But she was not to remain in that house.

During the three days in which Henri Meynard's body waited for burial, no beautiful unearthly music

had entertained us. Indeed, there had been no disturbance of any sort. It was as if with the death of the old man the Ghost of Stone Gables had flitted away. Then, suddenly, out of the heavens a wild burst of music.

The Judge left the table without apology, and I heard him going upstairs. For three days he had prowled the house silently, with the sullen determination of a small boy doing forbidden things.

The brothers, though refusing to do anything that would cause publicity, did not try to stop his prowling. It was as if they said: "Go ahead, wear yourself out, soil your clothes crawling through unused garrets, if it amuses you; but you will discover nothing. If ill comes to you, we have warned you."

We had begun the second course, but nobody seemed inclined to eat more. Presently Doctor Blackman excused himself and went out in the soggy front yard.

John and Louis tried valiantly to carry on, insisting on our eating.

Louis, pale as death, kept his eyes on his plate.

"I never heard anything so beautiful," Mrs. Thompson said calmly. That she was in no sense nervous or upset was clear. "It's unearthly."

And truly there was in the passionate flood of sound a beauty that seemed beyond human genius. If it had awed, overwhelmed me on the two previous nights, now it devastated, desolated me.

Such agony of soul, such despair I have never heard expressed before nor since. No known composition this, but the wailing of a soul condemned. Tortured, accepting torture, crying aloud, but having no hope.

To my surprise John broke suddenly. He stood up, flinging his napkin on the table with an odd violence. "My God! I can't stand it!" He addressed Louis, who, putting his hands to his face, burst into tears.

John went to him and with a strange gentleness drew him from the table and out of the room.

"They are both overwrought by their father's death," murmured Mrs. Thompson.

We sat in embarrassed silence. The two servants had left the room without permission upon the first burst of sound, and Sanchez, who had remained with Odollee tonight, evidently knowing what the maids would do, came in to see if we wanted anything.

"Our coffee, Sanchez," said Mrs. Trompson. The woman was clearly without nerves. After coffee she asked me if I cared to come to her room for a little chat.

I gladly accepted, but there was so little that we could talk about that I went up to our rooms shortly and lay on the couch reading until quite late.

I had just risen to turn off the light in my room when a woman's scream rang through the house. A single, p i e r c i n g scream. Then silence.

With every pore in my body pierced by cold needles, I ran out and down the stairs. Mrs. Thompson stood just outside her door, white as the nightgown she had forgotten to cover. John and Louis arrived in dressing robes as I turned the corridor; Doctor Blackman and Judge MacCauley came up as I did.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Mrs. Thompson was saying. "Really, it's too absurd. I'm addicted to the most hideous nightmares, though it isn't often I scream out like that. Please go back to bed, all of you. I promise it won't happen again. My horror dreams never repeat themselves in the same night if I come fully awake as I am now."

She was smiling, profusely apolo-

getic, and clearly anxious to be rid of us.

The men looked rather blank, made some awkward inquiries about her being sure she was all right now, and bade her good-night. When I asked if she'd like me to sleep with her she laughingly assured me she couldn't sleep with a bed-fellow.

I went back upstairs convinced that I'd witnessed as fine a piece of acting as I'd ever seen. Terror had wrung a scream from her, blanched her face; it had torn from her the dress-consciousness so ingrained in woman, but it had not robbed her of the gallant spirit known as "southern pride," which s m i l e s and lies, acknowledging neither defeat nor fear.

She left us quietly the following morning.

A NUN now came over to take care of Odollee. However, John and Louis had asked Mrs. Gerodes, as a great favor, to continue in the house as their guest in the capacity of chaperon to Odollee and me. John did the correspondence and Louis explained to me.

She consented without enthusiasm. All enthusiasm had long been dead in her, if, indeed, it had ever existed. However, when John asked her to dine with us that evening, her violent objection struck me as odd. She wrote furiously and gesticulated almost as if in a panic.

But John was insistent, explaining it would relieve them of embarrassment if she would act at table in his father's place until the question of the head of the house was settled. She considered this. Then, with a darting glance at me, consented.

I thought perhaps she was afraid of blundering—as I was, myself. But I soon discovered my error. Had she been mistress of the house she could not have managed the service with more dignity and assurance. Though dinner was a formal affair in this house, there was no hesitation, no confusion in her mind. That she had been brought up in an atmosphere of culture there could be no doubt. She was never at a loss. And accustomed as I am to folk where personality is a commodity, never have I encountered a presence so compelling.

Speechless, noiseless as a cat, she, nevertheless, held the centre of the stage; like a star, with all the action revolving around her. I wondered if anybody else thought of the curious fact that she was never "out of the picture," as we say—never overlooked.

On the second day of her installation as head at the table, it came to me that every minute she was with us in the dining-room she was like one in deadly fear. Eyes lowered, she yet watched us with furtive, darting glances. And her rather large shapely hands fluttered in spite of the effort she made for calm, as evidenced by the grim line of her mouth and the rigidity of her square, raw-boned shoulders.

I wondered, too, at her controlled persistence in never fully lifting her eyes during the meal. How could she always remember? And what was it she feared when we were at the table?

In the library, over coffee, her strange reticence would fall away somewhat. She would look us in the face as pleasantly as was possible for one with such bitter eyes; but the grim lips never smiled.

If addressed in French, by watching carefully she could understand. She did not use her slate at these times and responded with expressive gestures. Immediately after coffee was served, making signs that she wished to be excused, she would retire.

BUT for the Judge I am sure I should have gone quite out of my mind during this week of waiting—for what? Odollee's recovery—and God only knew what then.

The Meynards had a car, seldom used and the only one on the islands. John told me to use it as I liked, and sometimes I drove over the island, which was now fully restored to its glory of color, sunlight and serenity.

Negroes yodled in the fields. Chinamen bent silently over tomato plants, and brown-skinned Malays worked among banana trees. We passed through acres of cane and rice, coming out on the plantation village. A broad, beautiful island of teeming life, peace and plenty.

Henri Meynard was never mentioned. Almost it was as if he had never been. Though I knew his sons had not forgotten. They were abstracted and silent; maintaining the amenities of hosts with an effort. The Judge and the Doctor, with their endless arguments, were a great help.

No attempt had been made so far to question Odollee, anxious as we were to know what she had to tell. This reticence was due to Doctor Blackman.

"She has sustained a fearful shock," he said to the Judge, who was openly impatient. "If you recall the occurrence of that night to her precipitously, her reason may snap like a thread."

And there it rested.

CHAPTER XXX

LOVE AND A GREAT ESTATE

HEN Odollee was finally able to sit up, John insisted on taking her for a drive. She protested weakly, but he lifted her in his arms, carried her downstairs and out to the waiting car. Louis and I sat in the back.

Presently we plunged into a mangrove jungle which ended in the sea, as everything ends in the sea on Meynard Isle. And John turned the car back. Coming out of the swamp, a strange sight met our eyes—a huge scarlet sun swam in a green sky above a sage sea.

Not a breath stirred the palmettoes along the beach drive, yet the whole circle of the sea was one uninterrupted heaving of soft green swells, like the smooth foothills of some mountain chain in curious motion.

They would sweep forward as if to deluge the lowland, only to dissolve suddenly and race with little hissings over the sand. The moaning voice was still, as if the waters had suddenly become secretive.

Even as we watched there came a change. The sea flattened and shivered. Its green took on violet lights, turned gray, molten silver. The sun showed golden ribs. There came a whispered thunder. A greater hush. The whole sea shuddered.

And the land, which had appeared so broad between the twin vastness of sea and sky, shrank to the measure of a man's hand among the stars.

John drove swiftly back toward the house, and I could see by the gravity of his and Louis' faces that I had not finished with the terrors of this land of scented vapors and tawny light; of deluge and intrigue—this kingdom with its feet in the treacherous sea, its head bared to a volcanic sky.

Louis, stepping out of the car first, lifted Odollee and carried her into the house. She wanted to walk, but he would not hear of it. John looked annoyed.

When she was inside, Odollee made Louis put her down; but she

was very weak and he kept an arm around her. I was at the second landing when I heard them enter the main hall.

Having recovered a little of my nerve, I went on up to our rooms. It's difficult to believe much in ghosts on a bright day, especially if you've been s p e n d i n g countless hours, for a week past, with a red-headed Britisher, whose eyes peer cheerfully at you through shell-rimmed glasses the while he refuses to see gloom.

Tom had done a lot to buck me up. Also the fact that a whole week had passed and nothing awful had happened, together with the unremitting sunshine, gave me courage to go upstairs alone.

I thought I'd have the bed turned down in case Odollee was tired and wanted to lie down.

I was in her closet looking for her kimono when she and Louis came in.

I heard them talking together. Suddenly he said: "Odollee, I can't bear the suspense of not knowing any longer—won't you tell me what happened that night?"

"Oh, Louis," she said, "it's too awful. I can't."

"You can, dear. Please tell me."

There was a long pause. Then Odollee's voice:

"You know I asked you before dinner to give me the letter to him."

"Yes."

"Well, I gave it to him."

I knew I should make my presence known, but it wasn't in human nature, after all I'd been through. I felt I had a right to know something.

Also, I'd heard one of the men shout at John the terrifying word "hurricane" as we drove in, and I felt if we were about to be swept off the earth I would surely die a little happier if I had nothing on my mind but the hereafter.

"Did father read it?" Louis asked.

"Yes."

"What then?"

"He looked as if he could easily kill me."

"That was his way, dear."

"He threw the letter in the fire. I told him there was a copy of it in the same hand in a bank vault in New York. That was when he got so furious. He said something awful to me—then, before I could think, it had happened. Oh, Louis, it wasn't I who murdered your father. You believe I didn't do it—don't you?"

Ah—so he had been murdered.

"Yes, dear. John and I both know you didn't. You couldn't have. Besides, we couldn't believe ill of you. We love you."

I almost fell over a chair at this point. "We love you" was too much.

"Tell me, dear, did you see—tell me all—don't spare me—nothing could be so cruel as—not knowing."

"Your father was speaking to me—he told me—he was going to kill me and himself—his eyes suddenly started — horribly — staring at the wall just over my head—I was sitting—as if he saw something behind my chair.

"Before I could look around he screamed and sprang up, fumbling frantically for his gun. I sprang up, too. I did not look around. I was paralyzed by something he did not see."

"What?"

"A man's form on the floor behind a couch, near the music-room door, at your father's back. As I looked, something seemed to fly through the air, l i k e a snake. I screamed. There was a shot. Uncle Henri was jerked from his feet. That's all I remember till someone was pounding on the door. I must have fainted for a minute and the pounding waked me."

"Did you see the face of the man?"

She seemed to hesitate. "No. He was on the floor. Then, as that thing flew through the air, the man leaping up as it came, I covered my eyes."

"Then the Judge was right," sighed Louis.

He went on presently. "Judge MacCauley took some papers from father's pocket. Among them was a joint letter to John and me. In one he told us he expected to die soon—probably that very night; that, in case anything happened to him, no matter what the circumstances, we were to hush it up. There must be no investigation, no public scandal of trying to solve the mystery. If the circumstances pointed to violence, we were to say he was a suicide. We would know he was not and give him Christian burial, but it would be better to give out suicide as a result of ill health than to make our house a laughing-stock.

He enclosed with this another letter, which we were to make public in case it were necessary. This letter simply confessed that he was about to take his own life due to ill health, asked our forgiveness and the forgiveness of God.

John read the letters and told the Judge there was nothing of importance in them. Later he passed them to me. I am less controlled than he, so he didn't want me to read them before the Judge and slipped them in my pocket so I'd know that I must read them in secret, but at once, and stand with him. I would have been all for stirring up a fuss, as he knew."

"There's another thing father told us—he wanted the succession to continue. We were to decide the head of the house by a game of chance—cards or chess. If we failed to carry out his wishes in this, he said, then his life had been a failure, his death in vain."

"Yes, I'm sure he would feel so," she sighed.

"We don't know," he continued; "perhaps never will know your place in our lives; but we both love you. You know that, Odollee, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Unfortunately, we both can't have you; but—oh, my dear, do you care at all—for either of us?"

"Yes."

"Which?"

"It doesn't matter which," she said. "I shall marry the one who wins. I must. To right a wrong."

"My God!" he cried. "Isn't it enough that one will have the estate? It makes the balance too great."

"It's always been too great. Oh, Louis, why not divide it and stop this tragedy. Always the tragedy of poverty to one. It isn't fair. And now a woman's heart thrown in the scale."

"And the hearts of two men."

"Then divide. And let the best man win in love, not merely the richest man. Division would set us all free. This succession puts us deeper under the yoke."

"We can't ignore father's last wish, couched as it was: 'If you fail me in this, my life will have been a failure, my death in vain.' But surely you, dear, could choose where your heart lies. Surely you needn't throw your love into the scale."

"Yes. I, too, have a duty. Divide, and I shall be free. Otherwise, I must go with the estate. It won't be so difficult as it might have been, thank God, for I love you both—though of course — don't, Louis. Don't." Her voice came up sharply.

"Forgive me, dearest. I am mad for you. Mad. I could say good riddance to the estate if only I could

have you. I'd gladly surrender all my rights if, for my part, I could have you."

"Please, Louis. Leave me. I'm tired."

"All right. Good-night, sweet girl."

I was ashamed to come out after he'd gone. But I had to. I started to apologize, but Odollee said:

"I was rather sure you were in there, Jackie. Otherwise you would have followed us up very shortly."

But she seemed disinclined to talk and I went outside and sat on the parapet to think of what I'd just heard; of its significance. Another duel—this time cards or chess—love thrown into the balance with a great estate. I pitied Odollee. And I pitied the brothers. What meant that old man's words—"My life—my death will be in vain."

And what now? Louis was right. The odds were too great—for a weak man. And Louis Menard was a weak, if not a downright, vicious one.

That he loved Odollee, I had no doubt. Yet there was that hideous scene when but for the timely arrival of Sanchez—and perhaps that music—he would have flung decency, his position as a host, centuries of culture, manhood even into the limbo of savagery.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SPINNING FURY

MORNING brought a gray sky, a gray sea. The trees shivered and whispered together.

And across the stillness came a far-off moaning as of innumerable women wailing across the world for the return of their men from the deep.

At one o'clock, when the men came in for lunch, I heard John phoning the clerk at the Inn to put cots in the halls and send word to the cottagers that everybody must spend the night at the hotel.

Recollecting that the south and west of the house were guarded by forest giants, I fled to the old drawing-room whose dimness of drawn tapestries hid the shivering play of lightning which intermittently illuminated the other rooms. A clap of thunder like the explosion of a big gun brought me to my feet.

A treetop had snapped off, falling with a fearful crash on the roof, smashing among the gables. I fell back into my chair as someone came into the room. Having entered from the upper end of the hall, I sat facing the big, cold fireplace at the north end of the room, my back to the door giving on the front of the hall.

I heard John's voice. "What is it you want to speak with me about, old man?" he asked.

"Don't you think we should take some steps toward the settlement?"

"With no will, an equal division is the legal settlement," said John.

"Don't you consider father's letter a will? He reminded us that succession has become a law in our family, established by generations of men who considered it right. Not only that, John, but he said if we didn't continue it his life and death would have been in vain."

"Very well," said John, "the sooner the better. When shall it be?"

"Tonight."

"Where?"

"In the tower where father and Uncle Pierre decided it."

"You mean where they didn't decide it, but mischance decided it for them—unfairly," retorted John.

"Why mischance?"

"Because, according to the terms

of the agreement, Uncle Pierre being the first to draw blood became the heir, as in fact he was already, for he was the older son, as father confessed one day in one of his deliriums. Sanchez, too, swears it, even now."

"Father didn't know Uncle Pierre was the heir when he fought the duel," Louis said, quick in defense of his father.

"I'm afraid he strongly suspected it," said John sadly. "Everybody on the plantation believed it. And if Uncle Pierre and not father was the head of the house, then we know that if he'd had his way the estate would have been divided. Why may we not be governed by his will?"

"No, for, even if he *were* the heir, his death made father the head of the house, and father's insistence on the duel shows how he felt."

"An insistence which caused Uncle Pierre's death and p r e y e d on father's mind, torturing his last days—perhaps causing his death. I think it's time to end this nonsense. We are Americans.

"We have no claim on any other nation, owe them no debt. Why, then, should we follow their customs? Why not abide by the laws of our own country? If you insist on the continuance of this absurd custom—and you have as much right to your will as I have to mine—I concede to your wish that the house shall have a head. To that head shall go Stone Gables, with its acres; but Le Petit goes to the younger son."

"As you say."

"Chess or cards?"

"Cards. Poker. Showdown. Three out of five."

"All right. But it is a childish way of settling an important matter. Even father and Uncle Pierre's way was foolish enough, but this——"

"You p r e f e r swords?" asked Louis.

"Are you crazy?"

"All right. What time?"

"Twelve o'clock. After the house is abed. And, John, I want to tell you that if I win I shall ask Odollee to be my wife."

John did not answer.

"If I lose I will get out—leave the island at once. Do you agree to the same terms?"

"As you are—who you are," said John hotly, "and I love you as Sanchez says Uncle Pierre loved father, I agree that if you win I'll keep away from her till—she has decided. But if she refuses you I shall feel free to ask her to marry me."

"We will announce the result of tonight's contest at breakfast, and the terms of the settlement after her decision." Louis spoke hesitatingly.

I did not like the husk in his voice, the place and hour chosen, nor his haste; and still less his curious wish to keep the fact of even so small a division from Odollee till after her decision—as if he knew who would win and wanted her to feel the loser a beggar.

"If you win, you make the terms," John agreed. "If I win I shall not hesitate to tell her that Le Petit goes to you."

"As you please. Twelve o'clock!"

Their steps died away and I arose cautiously, when, at the bottom of one of the window curtains I saw the toe of a heavy shoe.

My first impulse was to raise the curtain; instead I went out of the room noisily, re-entering at once and slipping behind a portiere. There was about time for me to get well hidden when Mrs. Gerodes stepped out of hiding.

Then I knew that old woman could hear.

What did it mean? What was Mrs. Gerodes doing on these islands

passing as a deaf mute? She had lived for years on Le Petit. Then, all at once, she had come into this house. Sanchez had suggested her as nurse for Odollee.

What was I to do? Tell John and Louis, of course. But should I tell them now when they must be laboring under tremendous nervous strain? The storm, ruined crops, maybe loss of life—men and cattle—and the coming contest in the tower—for wealth and love. Surely one day more or less would make no difference.

I must have time to think. I must recollect where I'd seen Mrs. Gerodes. If I could do that, I would have the key to the mystery. I could expose her fraud and perhaps at the same time uncover her treacherous purpose.

Tomorrow—one day more of ignorance added to the years that she'd lived here could not matter to them. Tomorrow she could explain herself.

BY dinner time the sea was in a spinning agony. At last the wind had come. It cried out in a voice of woe. Horses neighed, cows mooed, and the dogs yelped in their kennels.

Yet not one drop of rain had fallen, and the night sky was full of stars. There was something awe-inspiring, something that chilled the blood in this revelation of the infinite forces. It was a sight never to be forgotten.

The old trees in front of the house strained and groaned agonizedly. Lightning shot across the star-strewn sky in long zig-zagging streaks of flame that lit the night as with great torches that were repeatedly extinguished, leaving the stars to their calm.

Dinner was a long and tedious form. Our hosts were quite matter of fact about the storm; but they could not entirely conceal a certain nervous tension.

"I suppose the crops will be ruined," Louis remarked in the midst of an amusing story the Judge was telling.

"I wish the hands wouldn't stay in the village," said John. "Why don't they come up to the house?"

"Old Tobias knows the sea. If he thinks there's danger they'll know it in time."

"In time for what?" I asked, frightened by their words.

"Oh, don't worry; this blow may last two or three days, then die down without ever growing much worse than it is now."

After dinner we had some gramaphone music and tried to pretend we didn't hear the rising wind.

Mrs. Gerodes, who had appeared more uneasy during dinner than usual, excused herself before coffee was served. It was almost as if she seemed that I had found her out.

Looking back, I wonder now what kept me silent.

Odollee, who had come down for dinner, retired at ten o'clock. If she were afraid of the storm she gave no sign. At ten-thirty I said good-night and went upstairs.

It was dark in our apartment and, thinking Odollee asleep, I entered softly, made my way to the table and, easing open the drawer, took out my gun. There was a sense of security in the feel of it.

Henri Meynard, like Louis, had rejected the proposal of a division . . . and Pierre had been buried in a sealed tomb. Would history repeat itself tonight? If so, I determined that there would be somebody present besides Sanchez to tell the story—somebody who was not a dependent, nor the new Lord of Meynard.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE EVIDENCE OF MY PAISLEY SHAWL

I DON'T know what gave me the courage to do the thing I did that night.

Tense nerves resulting from the events of this terrible week, and also a feeling that nature's forces were stepping in to end the drama for all of us, lent me the courage of desperation.

The lantern which hung outside our door had been extinguished. Night like black velvet folded over and around the roof patio. The stars had gone out. But an increasingly recurrent zig-zag of lightning shot across the darkness in terrifying sword thrusts.

I dropped to my knees for fear of being swept over the parapet, and scurried on all fours across the roof.

When I came to the pitch black hole leading upward into the tower I wanted to turn back but—whatever happened on this night, I must be there for the final curtain.

With my foot on the first step, my throat went dry; my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth.

Up and up, round and round, I went till at last I sprawled forward on my hands from having tried to take a step where there were no longer any steps. Rising cautiously, I began to feel for the wall, careful not to move too quickly for fear of plunging downstairs in case I had turned around in rising.

Having previously investigated the tower, I knew there were three doors in the little square room; one at the top of the stairway leading from the roof; one opening into a little alcove used at some time for a sleeping-room by the light keeper.

The third opening was opposite the alcove and led to a narrower stairway which rose to the left in which the great lamp was set. There were several cracks in the loft floor through which bars of light fell into the little room without, however, lessening the surrounding darkness.

A musty sacking curtain, heavy with dust, hung over the door to the alcove. I pushed it aside, stepped in and sat down on the floor. To wait.

The storm had become appalling. Or perhaps I heard it more plainly up here. It reminded me of a time when Dad and I were caught in a hurricane on top of Mount Hope.

This, though, was a thousand times worse. Then, I could see and realize the beauty of the elements. Here I felt trapped. In a pit of horrors.

I looked at the illuminated figures on my watch. Eleven-fifty. Ten minutes more! I decided that I would not wait till morning to tell what I knew about Mrs. Gerodes. As soon as this game was over——

A great nostalgia for the safety of New York swept over me—New York with its slovenly feet in a murky sea, its dun-colored head in a lead sky. I was homesick for the canyons, the surging solitudes and bellowing strife of the cruelest, the kindest, and biggest and littlest town on earth.

When the weekly boat came, if God spared this island, I would leave to its slumbering cataclysms this land where the dogs had lost their bark and no prying police ever came; where men were murdered and buried without inquest and the very elements strove together for possession.

I would never know the mystery of Odollee's curious childhood, nor who had brought her here. I no longer wished to know.

THE darkness came alive with

loathsome slinking creatures. Eyes watched me from every corner. Skeleton hands reached out, hands that were all fingers, attached to no wrists. Long fang-like teeth gnashed at me.

All the jungle terrors — filthy, crawling beasts and birds of prey, that dogged the steps of primitive man—rushed down the ages to people the blackness of that tower. So intolerable became my fear that I scrambled up, ready for flight. A light flared in the little square room beyond the dusty curtains. I cried out.

"What was that?" It was Louis' voice.

"The wind," John replied.

I had not heard them enter. John, holding a flashlight, struck a match, touched it to a little tin lamp hanging on a nail against the wall. Its tiny wick caught the flame. He set it on the old deal table in the center of the room.

Without speaking, they drew up two ancient hide bottom chairs and sat down. At John's back was the door which led to the lower floors; at Louis', the door ascending to the loft stairs.

From my position in the dark alcove, I looked directly into Louis' face. John's face was partly in profile. The light was no more than a taper without a protecting chimney and swayed drunkenly.

I know nothing of poker, and their monosyllabic conversation was not intelligible to me; but my trained memory recorded every word.

"Showdown?" asked Louis.

John nodded. "Cut for deal."

They cut the cards.

"You deal," said John.

Louis dealt five cards to John, then five to himself. They looked at their hands.

"Cards?" Louis said questioningly.

"Two."

"I'll take three." He dealt two to John; three to himself. After discarding they examined their hands.

"What have you?" asked Louis.

John laid down his cards without speaking.

"One." This from Louis, who had also laid down his cards.

I could not be sure which of them had won the game; but I thought John had from the expression of satisfaction that crossed his face.

Louis' face was ghastly in the flickering light of that small flame which, casting a pale yellow circle over the table, failed to penetrate the shadows beyond.

Once more the cards were dealt. The same words repeated as if some hypnotic play were in progress. Again they laid down their cards.

"One and——" said John.

The wind had risen to a bellow, hideous, indescribable. The sea boomed like great artillery, the mighty trees groaning and creaking and screaming resistance under its cannonade.

All at once a ghostly hush. A brief stage pause, it seemed, before some significant line. Then it was as if the earth had opened, and the tumult of all the unhappy dead had reached up to the heavens to be sent back in reverberating echoes.

The whole tower burst into a flame of white shivering light. A crash! A fall! A tearing of mighty timbers! The tower reeled.

Louis sprang up.

"One of the trees!" said John. He, too, was standing. "What's Tobias thinking of? Why don't the villagers come up?"

As if this were a cue, above the

bedlam of the night came the screaming of human voices. Four hundred voices calling out in terror for admission to the safety of the "big house."

"Thank God!" It was John who spoke. "I don't see why they waited so long. Shall we go down?" His thoughts were more upon his people than upon himself.

"No, let's finish first. Everybody's safe."

They sat down and began again the game for wealth and love.

Not a drop of rain had fallen through all this fusillade of the elements. Now it came. In a deluge undreamed of; unimagined by people who have not witnessed a tornado in the tropics. Again and again the tower leaped into shimmering light.

The men did not falter. Storms were no new things to them. The Islanders were safe in this house—unless the island itself went.

Two more hands were dealt. They drew and discarded, and laid down their cards swiftly with no unnecessary words.

"Two and two," said John.

Louis' face seemed to grow old before my eyes, so drawn and white was he. One side of his underlip was caught fiercely between his teeth. His eyes glittered. It was his deal. He hesitated . . . looked at John, whose gaze was on the table . . . then began the deal. His long white hands appeared weak and ineffectual. He fumbled, then snipped off ten cards.

John took one card. Louis did not draw.

The last hand.

My heart pounded so heavily that a veil fell before my eyes. I felt faint and reached for the door, hoping to steady myself.

What was the matter with me? What did it matter to me who won? I had no personal interest in either. I knew Odollee loved John, and even if he lost—as a master of Le Petit, he would still be a wealthy man. Why this sense of impending disaster? Why this icy, shivering apprehension?

Once more the lightning glared whitely into the room.

"What have you?" asked John.

They laid down their cards.

John had two queens and two deuces. Louis held three aces and two kings.

For a moment they stared into each other's silent faces. Then John reached his hand across the table.

"Congratulations, old man."

The words were scarcely spoken —Louis' hand had barely started out to meet John's when there came a sharp sound inside the room, louder than the tumult without, a snap, like the crack of a whip.

And Louis slumped forward across the table, extinguishing the light.

I heard John spring up. "Louis! Louis!" he called. Evidently his flash would not work. He struck a match, lit the lamp with hands shaking so that he could scarcely hold the match. I had rushed out of the closet. I stood inside the room—a gun in my hand.

"You!" cried John.

"No, not me! It came from the loft." I broke my gun and extended the unexploded shells to him. He lifted Louis' body. The dark head fell against his shoulder. A red stream trickled out through his hair and down his face.

John laid him back on the table, where he slumped in a horrid ungainly sprawl. Snatching up the lamp, John took the loft steps four at a time.

I watched him disappear around the first turn. There came a smacking sound. Blackness. The sound

of a heavy body tumbling down the stairs. A rush of air as a figure passed me. I reached out instinctively and caught a hand—a soft strong hand, which was wrenched violently from me.

I dashed after the flying figure, stumbled, half-fell at the first turn. Recovering, I reached the roof just in time to see the light go out in our rooms as the door closed. I stopped in horror.

I was clinging to the casement when John gained the roof. So dark was it that I could not see him; but I reached frantically for his arm to keep from being blown away. And he went down the second stairway with me clinging to him.

"Oh, my God!" I cried as the corridor light of the second floor assaulted us.

I swayed dizzily. John stood frozen. He was holding my Paisley shawl. . . .

"Where did you get my shawl?" I screamed.

"From the shoulders of the person who was in the tower. It was flung over the light as I was pushed down. He jumped over me at the foot of the steps."

A pause. Then: "Jackie, where did you last see your shawl?" His voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"In my closet when I dressed for dinner."

Without a word he turned back to the roof and ascended the tower stairway. I followed. I didn't know what else to do.

The room was in darkness. He struck a match and I picked up the lamp lying on its side, leaking oil at the foot of the steps.

He held the match to the tiny wick. He stared down at Louis, sprawled across the table, then dropped heavily into the chair. His head fell on the table. Touched that other head which his hands sought gropingly.

AFTER what seemed centuries John lifted his face. It was dead white, his eyes tearless and burning. He got up and went round the table and, putting his arms around his brother, shifted him to an easier position, as if afraid that the dead man might be uncomfortable. The body sank into a less ungainly posture—and five cards fluttered to the floor.

John stood rigid. "My God!" he muttered, at last. "A holdout!"

He stooped down, picked up the cards and, gathering the two last hands, still lying face up on the table, shuffled them hastily together, so that no one else might read his brother's shame.

"Whoever was in that loft *saw*," I said. "That was why she killed him." I realized, too late, I had used the feminine pronoun.

After a while John's voice came as from out a void: "Jackie, what shall we do?" He spoke helplessly as to a much older person. "The whole village is downstairs."

"Let's go down and find Sanchez? Maybe she—"

"Sanchez!" He shot out the name, a fierce hope lighting his tortured face. "She hated father. She may have hated Louis."

He hoped Sanchez had killed his brother. Not—the girl he loved.

He started toward the door, paused and looked down at Louis. "Old man, I've got to leave you alone for a bit," he said softly, as if the poor body could hear.

I turned away, an aching in my throat, recollecting his words of the morning: "I agree because I love you as Sanchez says Uncle Pierre loved father.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SECRET OF THE TOMB

HE old Malay opened her door with a rattling of chains. She was fully dressed. It was plain to see she had not been asleep; also that she was not surprised at our visit.

"Open the door, Sanchez," said John.

John gave her and the room one searching look. Then told her what had happened in the tower.

The old woman listened stoically, her black eyes darting.

"Me keel heem." The words were uttered without a spark of feeling—coldly, monotonously. "Now me ready fo' die."

John moved as if to spring upon her. In the shock of the moment, he had forgotten her age, her sex.

"She lies!" I cried. "The hand I caught was soft. Her hand is like iron. Where were you when you shot?" I demanded.

"Een leetle room fo' sleep."

"I was in that room," I said, "and Louis was shot from the tower."

She looked at me with such fury that I shrank back against the wall. Then she turned to John as though to protect him from my evil influence; held out her arms to him. He went into them, stumblingly like a little boy in grief.

Whatever she had been or done, down through her skin, love and hate and long years of intimacy had linked her by unbreakable ties with the House of Meynard.

"Mammy baba. Leetle baba boy." He was not a man in her eyes; just the little boy she had petted and spanked and nursed to manhood.

He had indeed become a little boy. And strange, evil old creature that she appeared, she was the only mother he had ever known.

John withdrew from her embrace after a moment.

"The villagers must not discover what has happened," he said. "We must get him out. Oh, my God, Mammy! How can I give him to the terrible sea! But there must be no investigation or scandal.

"Oh, Mammy," he said, dropping back to his boyhood name for her, "do you know who could have done this? He wasn't popular."

How he tried to clear Odollee in his mind!

"Coom," said Sanchez tersely. "Mammy he'p."

Taking two sheets from a clothes press and wetting a towel, she led the way toward the tower. But John did not follow. He stood still, staring at my shawl which he still carried. Sanchez trudged off alone.

My mind seemed to be in a haze. There was something I'd meant to say to John. But I couldn't recollect what it was. All I could think of was that Odollee had caught Louis cheating his brother and had shot him.

John left me and I fled to the first floor, away from the horror overhead.

The throb of voices came from the kitchen. The villagers were laughing and talking. They had heard nothing above the storm. I drifted into the dining-room in which a light burned.

Suddenly I recollected what it was I had to tell John. He must find out why Mrs. Gerodes was passing for a deaf mute. How could I have forgotten? Oh, if only I could remember where I'd seen her face! I stopped—I had it almost.

Then, all at once, in that climatic fashion of the mind, there in the dining-room, I knew where I'd seen

those haunting eyes; why Mrs. Gerodes had been so uneasy always at table!

My feet took wings.

I found John at the foot of the circular stair, his head bowed on the iron rail.

Before I had finished what I had to tell him he was striding down the corridor toward Mrs. Gerodes' room. I followed like a confused and frightened kitten on the heels of its mother.

He rapped sharply on her door, then opened it. Empty.

"Let's go see Odollee," I said faintly. I clung to him on the roof, the wind almost lifting me from my feet, the deluge drenching me as we crossed. No sheltering tarpaulin in this hurricane.

Our door was locked; but after a moment Odollee opened it. She had pulled her kimono over her gown. Her hair hung over her shoulders in two heavy ropes of gold.

"Odollee," said John in a terrible voice, "Louis has been murdered in the tower. And the person who murdered him was wearing Jackie's shawl."

But John knew, as I did, that he had no need to tell her.

"It wasn't murder!" she screamed. "He tried to cheat you. The shot was an impulse. It was not intentional."

He sat down suddenly, on one of the bright chairs, dropping his head in his hands. "My God!" he groaned.

Presently he lifted his head. "Oh, my dear, you didn't know he was going to cheat when you hid in the loft *with a loaded gun.* Didn't you also know that if I lost, I'd get Le Petit?"

Odollee uttered a piercing cry. "So that's what you think! That I killed him to make you rich for me. And I loved you so!"

"You loved me," said John with a strident laugh, "but not enough to take me without the entire estate. Mrs. Gerodes overheard us. She told you——"

He got up and caught her wrist, cruelly. "Who is Mrs. Gerodes? By God, I mean to know who she is and why she has been posing as a deaf mute on these islands for years. Who is she? Is she your mother? Did she bring you here to kill my father and brother? Or did she kill them?"

Odollee burst into wild hysterical laughter and sank to the floor. John drew her up roughly.

She swayed, still convulsed by that terrible laughter. He pushed her toward the couch. She fell on it—laughing. Laughing. Laughing. He looked down at her a moment, then flung himself out of the room with me at his heels. I could not bear to stay with her.

Above the storm came faint echoes of that hideous laughter.

This night of shocks and susprises had not yet ended. Louis' body was gone. The room was as it had always been. Nothing different, except that the oilcloth had been removed from the table. Nowhere was any sign that a tragedy had occurred here less than an hour ago. Sanchez stood beside the table.

"What have you done with Louis?" shouted John.

In her broken English Sanchez told him that she had stopped the hemorrhage with the colodion she held in her hand, had washed Louis' face and brushed his hair over the wound.

There had been no sign on his clothes. Then she had carried him into the tower loft and had broken out all the glass. Tomorrow someone would notice the broken glass;

would come up and find Louis—*who went up to see about the lamp and had obviously been struck by lightning.*

A simple explanation! No investigation. No scandal. Clearly thought out. Easily arranged.

"Who gave you orders to do such a thing?" John asked, deadly calm.

"I did." A husky, masculine voice spoke out of the shadows. Sanchez, who had stood between the staircase and the table, moved aside and the dim circle of yellow light vaguely outlined the form of a man below medium height. He stepped forward, his rubber soles making no sound on the bare floor.

Spare, almost frail, yet of arrogant carriage, he stood revealed.

I recollect screaming once. Then a silence like sudden death fell on the little group. John passed his hand over his eyes and hair as if to brush away an obstruction to his vision.

The scene burned into my mind—never to be erased. The square, barren room with its little port-hole windows; the table, its dim light flickering; the rigid figure of the old Malay in her red skirt and hoop earrings——

And Mrs. Gerodes.

"Who are you?" John demanded.

"I am your Uncle Pierre."

Mrs. Gerodes, whose eyes had looked down at me daily in the dining-room from the pictured face of Pierre Meynard. A dark-haired, debonair boy, who, finding life good, had been secretly amused by it. No wonder I had not known her. What a different Pierre was here. Embittered, snow white, and yet unmistakably the same.

In that climatic moment just past, in the dining-room with the painted faces of all the Meynards staring down at me, I had recognized Mrs. Gerodes as *a Meynard.* What Meynard I did not guess, even then.

Silence inside. Outside, the booming of the sea, the groaning of the trees and the clamoring of the flood.

The old man broke the silence. How strange his voice! "I didn't intend to kill Louis when I brought the gun up, unless he tried to kill you, as Henri had twice tried to kill me.

"But I mistrusted him. I didn't like the night, nor the place of his choice for the game. It was such a night that his father chose. Many lives are lost in these storms. They obviate the necessity of investigation.

"For that we can be grateful tonight. I wouldn't have killed him for cheating if I had had time to think. But when I saw him trying to cheat you—cheat my girl—as his father had cheated me—I went mad—as on that other night when I aimed my sword at Henri's heart. The curse of the Meynards, my boy, is not a jewel; but their own passions."

John came out of the paralysis that had held him in those shocking first moments. His face went dark red. He took a swift step around the table.

Pierre Meynard did not move. "Too late, my boy. I've already taken the matter out of your hands. I'll be dead in less than an hour. I've been tired of living for some time and merely held on to see Odollee settled."

He swayed slightly, reached one hand to the table to steady himself, and a spasm of pain passed over his face. Sanchez placed a chair for him and he sank into it.

Presently he began speaking in his curiously husky voice. "How it all comes back—up here in the tower with the storm raging outside—the villagers downstairs." He passed an

emaciated hand over his white hair, staring into space.

Sanchez hung over his chair, the flickering oil light playing on her bright turban and the hoop earrings that quivered against her gaunt brown face making her appear a savage mother brooding in fierce love over her young, still and watchful.

Sing Lu's words came to me—"Cally knife. Bad loman. Lac debil." And much as she loved John, I felt it would not have been well for him had he made a threatening move toward her beloved "baba."

The low, hoarse voice continued. "Thinking of him now when it is all over for—both of us, I recollect more vividly the love I bore him as we came up here together laughing and joking. It was all play for me. A mere scratch to settle in sporting and gentlemanly fashion, which of us, as head of the house, would receive the other as a loved dependent.

"This was our agreement. But the moment we reached the seclusion of the tower, before we began to spar, he, my beloved, my more than brother, tried to cut my throat. there!"

The old man lifted his head, exposing a long, ugly scar. "The pain, the shock—ah, well, I went mad, and without thought made a lunge for his heart. He fell like a log, and in horror of what I had done I fled from the tower.

"No thought of his treachery came to me—only a fact that I had killed my beloved Henri. I would have flung myself over the parapet on the roof, but Sanchez, who had been hidden in the tower, caught me, dragged me into a room and cared for my wound which, though rendering me speechless for years, was not fatal.

"John, at sight of the ugly scar, staggered to the chair recently occupied by Louis.

The old man drew his frail form upright as if to brace himself for the ordeal before him.

"I was expert with rapiers. It never occurred to either Sanchez or me that I could have missed my aim. Nor could I have missed had the treacherous breast before me been other than his.

"But love, more deeply ingrained in me than the momentary hate generated by his act, had turned my aim aside even as passion thrust out my hand. My sword passed through the fleshy part of his body just under the left arm, buried to the hilt outside the bony structure of his body.

"All I knew was that my sword had plunged through my brother's body; that I had aimed at his heart; that my aim was deadly. Of the involuntary action of my subconscious mind I was then unaware.

"I was overwhelmed with grief and remorse and would have given myself up but for Sanchez. She pleaded with me to escape. No Meynard had died by the hand of a hangman. I yielded. The worst of the storm was over, and a heartbroken, frightened boy of twenty left the island in a rowboat.

"By a miracle I escaped the sea, to be picked up in high delirium by a tramp steamer and taken to Brazil. Speechless, half demented with grief, I became a tramp, a gambler and adventurer. Sometimes in want, sometimes in plenty. I drifted to the eastern continent, but always avoiding European cities where I might be seen and recognized by some American or argus-eyed detective.

"Once I wrote Sanchez knowing that, though she could neither read nor write, she would guess the letter was from me and have it answered if it were safe for me to come home. No answer came. And I concluded

the authorities were looking for me and she had not dared the risk of having it read."

He bowed his head on his hand and fell into silence. "Gradually my voice was restored, and after years of wandering I met and loved a beautiful Persian widow with a little daughter," he continued presently. "We were married.

"My wife lived only a year, bequeathing to me the little girl whom I legally adopted. And now, lonely, always dodging, never stopping long in one place, sick for home, never free from the torment of my brother's memory, completely broken over the loss of my beautiful wife—to escape the torture of my own mind I became a drug addict.

"And finally, yielding to my overwhelming homesickness, I returned to America determined to claim my inheritance for my little daughter and give myself up.

"But first I must see once more the home of my boyhood. To insure myself a safe journey I let my beard grow and donned dark glasses. I need not have feared. Horror, remorse, and intolerable hardship, together with the twin grief of losing my beloved brother and adored wife, abetted by drugs, had ravaged my face, my body.

"Even my voice was no longer the voice of Pierre Meynard. I left my child with a poor family in New Orleans, paying her board and care for a month, and proceeded to the islands.

"Afraid of being apprehended before proper steps had been taken to secure Odollee's future, I hid in the forest until night and went up the back stairway to see Sanchez.

"Then I learned for the first time that I was not my brother's murderer; that he was alive and well and the father of two boys. She told me that upon learning I had fled, believing I would not dare return, Henri had made plans to secure legal possession of the entire estate.

"The storm had favored him. Many bodies washing up, he had selected a water-ravaged, unrecognizable man, about my height, and pretended to identify him by the famous cat's eye ring, which he had himself placed on the man's finger.

"Sentiment, perhaps, or superstition prevented his burying the stranger in the tomb of our fathers."

Pierre paused, then went on laboriously: "I cared for none of these things, so great was my joy. Henri was alive. Nothing else mattered.

"I rushed from her room, down the stairs. Henri was in the library. Others might not know me—but Sanchez, who had mothered me and my twin brother, knew me. Even he did not recognize me at first. When he did——"

His breath came heavily, yet shortly.

"Well—he killed Pierre Meynard that night—killed his soul, as he had once tried and now tried again to kill the body.

"He choked me into insensibility, and carried me on his back under cover of the unused front grounds to the tomb.

"Sanchez, following him, hid in the forest and rescued me after he had gone. She had carried a key to the vault since the death of our mother, and she had carried keys, unknown to Henri, to every door in the house.

"Unaided she brought me to the house, up the private back stairs to the room. I lay for weeks on the threshold of death, secretly tended by her.

"The shock, following all my past years, proved almost too much.

When I was finally able to slip out of the house, afraid to meet Henri in my weakened condition, I went to see old Tobias and other old men who had known Pierre Meynard, but they fled from me as a ghost.

"Pierre Meynard was dead so far as the islanders were concerned. I had, however, no idea but that I would be able to establish my identity, and I was now determined to have done with this damned succession and claim my share of the estate for my child."

He paused, his face twisted, then went on determinedly. "But in New Orleans I met blank unrecognition. Everybody thought me demented. It was a preposterous situation.

"I had no proof that I was other than a renegade Meynard (if my striking Meynard countenance were taken into account) who had come forward with an absurd claim.

"The one link between me and the past was the captain of the tramp steamer who had picked me up. I went back to Europe. But before going, I placed Odollee in St. Cecelia, taking great precaution against her being stolen by Henri, who now knew of her existence and, believing I was now truly dead, would not hesitate to make way with her.

"The captain who had picked me up that terrible day after the storm was dead and his crew scattered to the four corners of the earth.

"I had lived for years under an assumed name. Pierre Meynard was officially dead and buried. I was a man without identity.

"Old before my time, with limited resources, my manhood undermined by the habit of fear, by suffering and finally by drugs, there was no fight in me. Henri was rich and powerful.

"I became obsessed by two ideas—to spend my remaining years in my old home, and to secure Stone Gables for Odollee by fair means or foul.

"Afraid of Henri, I conceived the plan which I have carried out with Sanchez' help. As a woman I could pass unnoticed, even on the Islands. I was forced to pass as a mute on account of voice. This was not difficult. Due to my years of speechlessness, I had lost the habit of speech.

"So, ostensibly, I lived on Le Petit. In fact I have lived at home. I became the Ghost of Stone Gables.

"It was Sanchez who conceived my diabolical revenge on my brother. Her love killed, as mine had been, we planned to hound him to his death; to give him no rest; to make a dope fiend of him as his cruelty had made one of me.

"When, finally, Odollee would be eighteen I meant to bring her here. I counted on the great beauty she promised as a child, the mystery surrounding her which the ring would create, to make her mistress of my house without further help from me.

"If that failed and Henri, knowing her as he would, refused to provide for her, then I meant to kill him, and in giving myself up try to establish my identity. But—I didn't kill him after all."

John, who had sat all this while with his head in his hands, looked up. The old man's breathing was increasingly labored.

"The night he died I, as usual, was listening inside the room, behind the portieres leading to the music room. Henri had locked all doors and put the keys in his pocket. But I had keys.

"When he told my child that unless she left the island the following day he would have her kidnapped by negro roustabouts and taken to sea by them to have their will with

her, I lost reason, dashed into the room just back of Odollee's chair.

"His scream of terror at sight of me, as a ghost, was quickly succeeded by knowledge of the truth. He sprang up, reaching for the gun he always carried, intending to end his own life rather than die horribly at the hands of a ghost. He'd always been superstitious.

"His crime and drugs had completed his demoralization. In the full light he knew the truth and would have shot me. I was unarmed.

"But there had been another listener at the other door behind Henri's chair. His one moment of terrified paralysis gave that listener a chance.

"By the time Henri had his hand on his gun—it had happened. It was all very quick. The descent of the noose, a swift contortion of a trained form, a curious twist of strong arms, a snap—and it was over.

"My defender left the room as he came in, through the door at Henri's back.

"I stood paralyzed. Your battering on the hall door awakened me and I, too, passed out, locking the music-room door after me. The other one had taken the same precaution. So both doors appeared to be locked on the inside.

"The manner of Henri's death protected Odollee. But, I meant to confess, if suspicion fell on her. It didn't; and so I have waited for the end of the drama which would insure her position here. She loves you, John, but had sworn to right my wrongs by marrying the heir. That's all."

HE was staring unseeingly at the dark cavern of the stairway, valiantly fighting to hold himself upright.

For the first time I spoke. "How did you get the ring from that sealed tomb? And whose handkerchief was that I found that first day in our rooms?"

He did not look at me. "The handkerchief was mine. You were confused when you discovered Henri and I used the same perfume. It was distilled by the same hand for us.

"The ring had never been in the tomb. Sanchez stole it just after the man was laid in his coffin. In her rage over what Henri was doing she kept it to work its evil spell on him, sewed it up in his mattress, where it was for fifteen years—till I asked for it to give to Odollee.

"It was to identify her to Henri when she would come to claim her place.

"There was a good deal of madness, no doubt, in my plans—the madness of desperation, drug and general demoralization. About the ghost—you have been on the stage, you must have seen the skeleton act in vaudeville at some time.

"A dark stage, black curtains, a man in black tights with a skeleton painted on in white. It isn't new now. I originated it in the days of my speechlessness as a means of livelihood. Together with my music it was highly successful. A treatment of liquid sulphur made the white outlines give off a faint light like that rubbed from a match by damp fingers.

"That—sometimes merely my illuminated face was the thing that made Henri's nights a hell—which John and Louis once saw. That was unintentional on my part." His voice grew weaker but he went on determinedly:

"Henri's terror gave me a fiendish delight. It made up somehow for the suffering he had caused me dur-

ing those hideous fifteeen years when he had let me think myself his murderer.

"You see, Sanchez had given him the letter I sent her, knowing it must be from me, and still having faith in him. But instead of writing me and releasing me from the double hell of remorse and fugitive existence, he destroyed the letter.

"Sanchez would have had some one else write, but not being able to read, didn't know the address I'd given. Henri not only tried to kill me, stole my birthright, but deliberately subjected me to death in life.

"I have not spared him these past fifteen years. And Sanchez has abetted me with diabolical noises and fumes that gratified the savage of her nature."

Now he turned to me.

"Your eyes, my dear, are very sharp. You alone saw the resemblance between Mrs. Gerodes and the boy portrait of Pierre Meynard, though you couldn't definitely place me.

"I knew sooner or later you would succeed. You, alone, recognized my unseen presence at the family conference and once caught me in nun's garb. You see, Mrs. Gerodes had no access to this house, but a Sister might be here to ask charity. So long as her back was turned she would, if glimpsed, excite no suspicion such as the figure of a strange man would have done.

"I donned the costume only when imperative that I leave my rooms in the daytime. I never slept on Le Petit. I went there merely to read and rest myself with music."

"Who killed my father, if you didn't?" asked John dully.

"A servant of mine. One who has been all over the world with me, and has been a servant in this house as long as I've been here—supposedly serving Henri. In reality serving me with Sanchez' assistance.

"As the crime committed was to save my life, you can hardly expect me to reveal the identity of my savior, can you, John?"

"No."

The white head sank back into Sanchez' waiting arms. "The tower light—it will be dark tonight, Mammy—whether they will or not—and neighboring ships will know that—the Head of the House of Meynard is dead—at last."

He drew from his pocket a curious musical instrument, a sort of combined harmonica and flute.

"Yes, bab," she crooned. "All da'k. Da'k all nigh' this nigh'."

"It is well. You see, John, the head of the house was not dead—on that other night. I no longer hated Henri; but I could not let the light lie—for the first time."

"My God!" cried John. "How could I have failed to know you?"

"Many others — failed — who'd known me as a boy—even seeing me in man's attire. My boy, measure my sin by my suffering and—forgive . . . end this tragedy of succession—and treat my girl fairly. Kiss her good-night, for her father, Jackie. Just a moment, Henri, old man!"

He lifted the instrument, which must have been his own invention, to his mouth—one wild burst of triumphant sound and the instrument fell with a clatter. And the old head sagged against the flat breast of his savage mother. She fondled him to her with a loud, despairing cry.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ROMANCE

SOMETIMES when a great unremitting grayness hangs over New York I recall long languid days bonneted in gold and slippered in quick-silver; roads

winding like white snakes through everlasting spring; soft winds. A land of infinite beauty. But also etched forever in my memory is my last day on the islands.

Cane fields flat where the sea had swept over them; rice fields submerged. Negroes and Chinamen lifting trees back into place and carting away wreckage. Toiling without rest; scarcely stopping to eat.

Louis Meynard was found in the tower, the shattered glass bearing false witness against the lightning.

John gave out that Mrs. Gerodes had died of ptomaine poisoning. No one questioned his word. The plantation negroes, with shy shufflings, filed, hats in hand, past the two sad forms lying side by side in the great drawing-room.

If any thought it strange that the woman had been "laid out" beside the young master, they merely whispered about it among themselves.

"How can they fail to see?" said John, as I stood beside him looking down at the faces of the two Meynard men. Pierre's face, robbed by death of its grim bitterness, was startling in its likeness to the younger man.

"We are most unobservant," John continued sadly, "of the things to which we are most accustomed."

But even in view of those two striking faces lying still before us, I wondered that John accepted the uncorroborated story told him in the tower by the old man during his little hour of ebbing life.

Perhaps there were dropped links in the life and death of John's father—unexplained things—which were picked up, explained by Pierre's story.

The resident priest performed the impressive Catholic service, and black men and brown, even a few almond-eyed men, knelt on the damp muck as the two coffins were carried into the great marble mausoleum.

I noticed that the name of Pierre Meynard on the isolated grave had been treated with cement—blotted out. The priest alone, besides ourselves, knew who was buried that day with Louis Meynard.

As we turned from the magnificent tomb in which three tragedies were forever hidden from a prying world, I wondered if a man could really lose his identity in thirty years; or if the terrors of those years, aided by drugs, had not weakened Pierre Meynard's intellect, magnified his difficulty.

What John told Judge MacCauley and Doctor Blackman, I do not know. Nor what they believed. Sing Lu, with a slit in his throat the morning after the storm, must have satisfied the Judge that justice had been served for the murder of Henri Meynard.

Whether he had died by his own hand, to follow his beloved master into further service, or whether a savage mother had revenged the death of her child whom she both fiercely hated and fiercely loved, will forever be unanswered.

Once in a great while I hear from Odollee and she is very happy in the insecurity of that land where men may be murdered and buried without question, and life is at all times like the sea, a slumbering treachery.

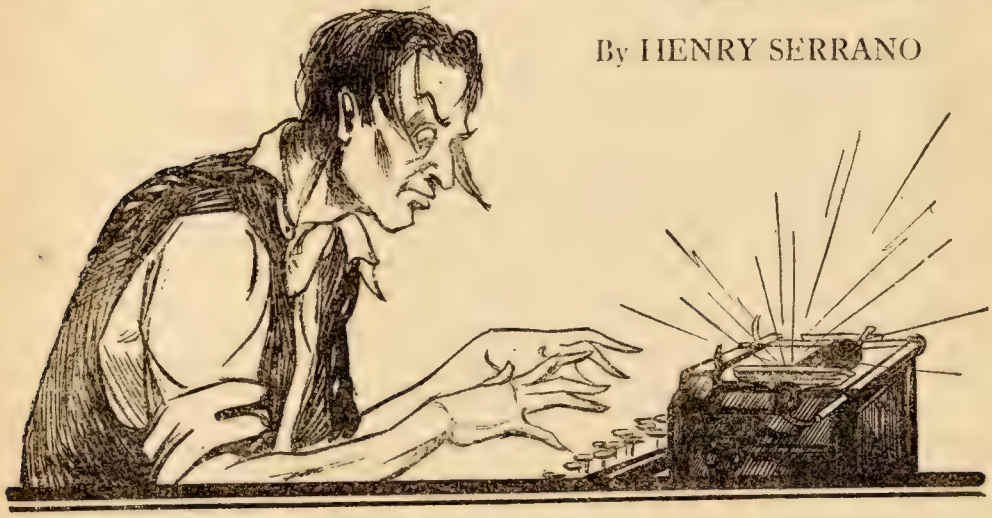
The succession is past. The great estate will be equally divided among her three sons—eventually split into many small parts.

For my own part, adventure has been exhausted. The shifting life of the stage now seems a vast serenity, and for me, peace, security and beauty are embodied in the roaring grayness of little old New York.

(THE END)

The Paxton Story

By HENRY SERRANO



JEFF LINDSAY, for the third consecutive day, was dead sober. This, in itself, deserved the responsibility of a good assignment. But combined with the fact that Jeff, in his non-alcoholic moments, was the "Star's" best reporter, there was some excuse after all for letting him handle the Paxton story.

"Here," exclaimed Cliff Rathbun, city editor, as he jabbed the telephone receiver on the hook, "is the livest yarn we've had in weeks."

Mr. Rathbun, with the morbid exultation of those who pray for news to make their newspapers, and whose prayers are unexpectedly answered, added triumphantly: "Seven men killed and at least fifteen injured! Somebody blew up something at the chemical works. We'll want all we can get on it for the home edition."

Glancing over the littered desks and typewriters, he debated for a brief second, deciding on Jeff. Which was, of course, a mistake in the first place.

In half the cities where newspapers are "great dailies," the name of Jeff Lindsay might be counted on to produce a facetious grunt of recognition.

For Jeff had worked in most of them during his twenty odd years of active editorial service. The length of his employment had varied, uniquely, from one hour on the hard-boiled western "Record" to a steady six weeks on the "Herald-Telegram" in the south, when he had suffered cruelly from stomach trouble.

You see, Jeff Lindsay drank. And Jeff drank so freely and so frequently that holding a job became, to him, a lost art.

Everyone liked good-natured Jeff Lindsay. Even when he forgot to cover an assignment in the course of a dizzy drinking bout, and showed

up next day, contrite and solemn as a chastened owl, no one had the heart to be resentful.

Jeff was rather ingenuous, with his booze; rather like an innocent, stray kid, whose wide, blinking blue eyes couldn't possibly mean harm to anyone.

He had long since ceased to take life seriously, storing up instead a wealth of spontaneous, though sedate, humor in his endless travels.

But, as it was regretfully and pointedly brought home to him on so many occasions, an unreliable, irresponsible reporter is no asset to any paper.

So Jeff Lindsay drifted unconcernedly toward the shoals of middle age, and found himself still a reporter—if not in New York, then in Omaha, Kalamazoo, Miami, or anywhere else that fate might choose.

The only reason he wasn't fired more often lay in his uncommon ability to write. Minus the bottle, he had a masterful knack of rating himself a by-line on stories that offered but stupid potentialities to other members of the staff.

All this Cliff Rathbun knew, and, accordingly, ought to have known better. But in the month that Jeff had been with the "Star," whether it was due to a growing respect for the state of his cast-iron system, or whether he was out for a new mark in job-holding, his work had been encouragingly free from intoxicated interruption.

And because Jeff *was* the best man for the Paxton story, his city editor took a chance.

"Phone it in for re-write if you're held up," Rathbun told him; "but I'd rather have you back here to do it yourself. We'll make over the bulldog edition and give it a 'page one' spread. This is going to be a helluva good story."

Jeff conceded agreement with a drawl, gravely filled his pipe, and, reassuringly sound of step, went forth into the murk of a cold and foggy night.

"And for God's sake stay sober!" Rathbun hurled after him. Subsequently, it was considered doubtful if Jeff had heard.

THE Paxton Chemical Works were the most important buildings in town. An explosion there was sensational in itself. But with such lurid possibilities as a wilful plot, a dastard's revenge, intimating whole columns of follow stories on succeeding mornings, a suppressed excitement lurked in the smoky atmosphere of the "Star."

For the next hour and a half reporters ground out final frivolities on the Rotary Club banquet or the election of officers in the Y. M. C. A. with the realization that their routine efforts were dwarfed from birth by Jeff Lindsay's forthcoming thriller. Even the stolidly abusive occupants of the copy desk worked with impatient tenseness.

It lacked fifty minutes of the "Star's" deadline when Cliff Rathbun, lounging back with thumbs in the armholes of his vest, betrayed the first sign of nervousness.

He pulled out a thick gold watch from the paunch of a belly that protruded disproportionately from his gaunt frame, compared the time carefully with the office clock, and lit a fresh cigar.

"Wonder where Lindsay is?" he ventured offhandly to the re-write man, finding security in the rasping boom of his voice.

When all the copy was in, and Jeff had not yet returned, the city editor blew uneasy rings at the ceiling and cursed softly. Everything had been hurried and cleared for the explosion story. Now, with the paper almost

ready to go to press, the great gap on page one loomed and yawned in menacing proportions.

Knots of men here and there, their tasks done, lit cigarettes and discussed Jeff Lindsay under the drop lights.

"He can write the story in twenty minutes. He's fast as the devil when he gets goin'."

"Yeah, but there's only twenty-three minutes to deadline now."

"Aw, they can stretch it a bit for a story as big as that."

"Wonder why he don't phone?"

Cliff Rathbun, who ought to have known better, knew now. "God, if he's drunk again——" Cliff's forehead was glistening with prickly perspiration. The clock showed a scant quarter of an hour of grace.

If the Paxton story didn't appear on the morrow, it would be months before the "Star" could live down the defection. Yet Jeff Lindsay, who alone commanded the facts, still failed to turn up.

The managing editor, angry and agitated as a trapped panther, strode from his office and conferred heatedly with Cliff Rathbun. Simultaneously, the downstairs phone jingled; the foreman of the composing room —autocrat of the plant—demanded how long he must wait to get the copy for page one.

"We'll have to hold over a few minutes. The story ought to be in now . . . right away." Rathbun spoke in something like panic.

WHEN the moment of deadline came and passed, open consternation gripped the staff of the "Star." It was too late to send out again for the story. If Jeff didn't come back, the paper was scooped.

Just at the blackest instant, someone gave a shout. There was Jeff, swaying in the doorway, a cordial grin on his flushed face. His polka-dot purple tie was askew. His hands were jammed in his trouser pockets, as if seeking to hold on and get control of his reeling body.

Jeff took off his hat with a sweep. The movement upset his balance—he stumbled against a desk. He drew himself up with ludicrous grandeur, and fumbled for his favorite silk handkerchief.

Long, damp strings of black hair, shot with gray, tumbled about his wavering, bloodshot eyes. He staggered forward. A bulky flask bulged from beneath his coat tails.

"H'lo, ev'rybody!" Jeff waved a friendly greeting with the handkerchief. A comprehensive, elaborate gesture. He radiated vacuous cheerfulness. With a flourish, he mopped his shining brow.

For one startled second, all stood transfixed. Then, from managing editor to copy boy, they rushed, on common impulse, to surround him.

"The Paxton story!" shouted Rathbun tragically. "Can you write it?" He mercilessly shook the lanky, tottering form.

"Pack-shton shtory?" queried Jeff with a frown. "What Pack-shton?"

Groans. Jeff was very drunk.

"Good God! The explosion! The explosion at the chemical works! Don't you remember?"

Jeff steadied himself on the city editor's shoulder. He seemed vaguely to concentrate. A raw, penetrating aroma of whisky spread from his disheveled person.

"Ohhhhhhh . . . yes!" The light dawned abruptly. "Of coursh. Why . . . hic . . . shertainly I c'n write it" —indignantly—"mo' shertainly! Jus' leave me alone . . . all alone . . . all, all alone . . ."

"Well, for the love of Pete, sit down and try!"

"Hell, he can't write in that condition!" snorted the news editor in disgust.

Frantically they sought to pave the way. Jeff protested loudly when they tried to support him, and proclaimed that he was perfectly able to compose the story, appearances notwithstanding.

His expansive geniality to the imperiously stern Cliff Rathbun, and his shuffling, uncertain feet, firmly contradicated this statement. But to let him make the attempt was the only chance—any kind of a story was better than a blank on page one.

The managing editor personally took charge. First he got hold of himself, firmly. Then he led Jeff, sniggering and lurching, into his own private office. He made him sit down at his own private typewriter, and saw that he had plenty of copy paper and carbon sheets.

Then he removed the nearly empty flask. And, before leaving the room, he demonstrated to Jeff, with all the dignity and impressiveness at his command, that for the sake of the Deity and the honor of the "Star," he must sober up sufficiently to write the story.

After that ceremony, he joined the others. "Just let him alone and pray that he'll do it."

For the first few minutes there was no sound from behind the closed door. The strained, anxious group talked among themselves in whispers, as if they feared to disturb a crisis in the illness of a dying friend. At last came the click-clack of a typewriter, slow and tentative—then gathering strength and speed. The listeners breathed a collective sigh of devout and tremendous thankfulness.

Good old Jeff! Crashing through after all!

Like the gradually culminating power of a cyclone, the keys beat a staccato tune that grew faster and more confident. The news editor, the city editor, and the managing editor clung together, hearing with awe the fingers of Jeff Lindsay—who was soaked and sodden in liquor—pound out the story of the Paxton explosion.

Presently, the keys slowed up. For a few more lines, the sound continued, haltingly, sporadically . . . finally ceased altogether.

The foreman of the composing room, the smell of ink on his clothes, stalked in from downstairs in person. "How long am I goin' to wait for that story? I can't hold the presses all night . . . dammit. . . ."

"It's all right, it's all right," soothed the managing editor. "You'll have the story in a minute." He burst open the door to his office. The rest swarmed after him.

Jeff Lindsay, breathing deeply, was sprawled over the machine.

"Passed out!" they voiced in unison.

Sleeping peacefully as a babe, a smile of work well done on his countenance, Jeff lay dead to the world. The surrounding air was like a distillery.

The managing editor lifted up the slumping figure. Rathbun, victorious, stepped forward to claim the story. Eagerly he searched the desk, the chair, the floor. . . . The silence grew painful and prolonged. Once again he looked, wild-eyed.

An ugly premonition of disaster began to stalk the crowding men, like a grim, relentless nightmare. They stared, hypnotized, at Cliff Rathbun's blanched face. "My God!" he moaned, bowing his head on his sleeve.

They caught their breath, aghast, afraid. . . .

"What—what is it?" the managing editor asked faintly.

Rathbun raised a stricken face. "The paper . . the paper!" he croaked. "He didn't put any paper in the machine!"

Ashes of Tael

THE LIVES of the living and the dead are closely intertwined in China. In the Chekiang province there is a whole town which is supported by the minting of special money for the dead.

Down the street comes a coolie. On his shoulders he carries the burden of generations of his clan.

Across one shoulder he balances a bamboo pole. This supports the heavily laden baskets that earn the money to feed his dependent living.

Across the other are hung the strings of tinfoil taels that will line the pockets of the dead.

And thousands of living, cramped women work all day long, folding and pressing tinfoil into little silver shoes, that the familiar dead may be satisfied.

But it is not the paper taels, the tinfoil sycee shoes themselves that are offered up for the benefit of the grasping ghosts. Smoke—the essence of the thing—is just as satisfactory a gift.

Indeed, all earthly necessities in the shape of paper houses, servants, horses, or what have you—are acceptable and effective in the form of smoke.

And, Phoenix-like, out of the ashes rises the basis for the living industry. For the worshipers gather the ashes from the burning and sell them to shops that extract the tin. And this resurrected tin forms half the material for the new taels . . .

Spread-'N' Adder

By HAYNES TREBOR

THE man was called just that. There were a few other local names for him—for instance, some called him "Parson."

It was mostly the women who used this term, women like Mrs. Farley and Sam Biddle's wife, which was all the more reason for the men to apply it with a tone of derisive sarcasm, and to make it the basis of their blunt, crude ribaldry.

A very few spoke of him, and about him, as Jude—occasionally, Jude Craddock.

But there was not a single person in the swamp country who did not recognize him as "Spread-'n'adder. It was the concentration of all the contemptuousness with which he was held by the inhabitants.

Not that it mattered, of course. Jude Craddock did not care, or anyway he seemed not to. He met their taunts with a kind of indifference, or at least his contempt for them was as stubborn and persistent as theirs.

He was too much taken up, too greatly concerned with his work, to be affected—maybe. Here an attempt to analyze Jude Craddock's character might lead to elusive ambiguities. He was a zealot, certainly, but that his work was any sort of ideal or contained any great, glorious goal would seem dubious.

Jude was the preacher in that particular part of the swamp country. But you are guilty of an unjust irony to think of Craddock as a divine—divinity was as remote from this man as was a collar from the brass collar button which never failed to dangle in the band of his soiled white shirt.

Jude was a preacher by his own volition, if not his own choice. He had not been ordained by any religious sect.

The religion that he preached was indeterminate so far as denomination went.

Craddock preached God—in a

kind of abstraction. He preached the Fear of God, the Wrath of God, the Vengeance of God—probably no one ever heard him mention anything about God and Love.

God, to Jude Craddock, was an unquestionable despot, and his duty, as a humble servant, was to lend his hand to the whip of His might and drive the errant goats into the folds, where their sins might be extracted and they be washed clean of the transgressions of the earthly life.

It may have been that Jude thought of the matter somewhat after the manner of the scalding and scraping of a hog at killing time in order to remove the muddy hair from the pinkish skin.

He was undecided about Heaven and similar irrelevancies of the hereafter; but he was emphatically profound when he expounded the dire perditions that would come. Their avoidance seemed to depend upon the strength of a hair. . . .

It would be unfair, and unkind, to say these things about Jude in any tone of derisive persiflage. The man was honestly sincere. Perhaps that is why the quips of the swampsters passed over his head.

Jude took up the work because of his mother. She was dead now and, possibly, Jude felt that there was no one who could rightfully give him permission to give up the work.

CRADDOCK preached from the Bible. His texts were rambling and often of uncertain reference. He often covered the whole scope of the book in a single sermon; there were certain aspects of it that he made constant use of.

His logic more often was hazy and hazardous. But the man had zeal and a tremendous force. If the whip of God was his only weapon he used it to all the advantage possible.

Jude sometimes felt that someone who was Almighty was needed, for it took strength to her sinners. . . .

He preached from the Bible; but he couldn't read a word that was printed in the tattered volume he owned.

All that he knew of its contents was what his mother had read to him. She must have read him a very great deal, and its purport was packed so densely into his brain, that it was quite natural that the more dramatic passages were the only ones that remained evident to him, like big trees in a swamp thicket.

Jude's mother had been the daughter of a moderately well-to-do family, her father being the owner of a considerable turpentine business and a sawmill. She had married a backwoods youth, illiterate, ignorant, simple.

Age is like a veil; it gradually gets thinner and thinner with wear. It was the girl falling in love with youth with its mystical fascination, the veil hiding the background from her eyes.

She tried to make something of her husband afterward; but the swamp lets its children go forth with free rein, for a brief instant, to mate, then they come back and are absorbed by the inexorable environment. It may have been that the woman regretted her marriage.

The husband refused to let his son be educated. He saw no need for it; the means were not easily accessible in the swamp country. And what wisdom is there in a man raising a son if he cannot be used to help the father fight the swamp for a living?

Scarcely has middle age crept on before the swamp is allowed to get its final, relentless grip. It is never

long afterward before it has won.

After Jude's father died, his mother taught him to write his name. He could do that laboriously, but further knowledge seemed unable to find ground in his brain in which its roots could obtain a hold.

A man at thirty is not one susceptible to the subtleties of education. His hands are gnarled and coarse with struggle, his eyes are tired and his lips hard, and the inevitable disease has crept into the very marrow of his bones . . . a frog, about whom the coils of a moccasin are wrapped, does not bother to think of the loveliness of the Cherokee Rose.

It was the woman's one passionate dream to have her son a minister of the gospel; perhaps, bitterly, she would have found some consolation in seeing God brought into the cruel rank materialism of the swamp.

She fostered this hope jealously. Almost cunningly she contrived to get a hold on her son. After her husband died, she worked her plans to the point of practice. And eventually it was the mother who started the little congregation in the backwoods to which Jude Craddock preached every week.

THERE is a snake in this locality, of the adder tribe. It is reputed to be harmless by those who should know. It is a ridiculously futile reptile, held in ludicrous disregard by the swampsters.

This snake frequently is as large as a full grown moccasin and, to the lay observer, is faintly similar to it in general appearance.

Its common name is Spreading Adder, but, in the vernacular of the backwoods, the syllables have been slighted so that two letters are omitted from the derivative and the "n" pronounced with the proper name in a slurring effort. Thus the name sounds like Spread Nadder.

The name is significantly applied. The moccasin coils up silently and, when menaced or aroused, strikes with hardly a warning noise before the deadly fangs have found their mark. But the "Spread-'n'adder is different.

When approached, instead of coiling, it stretches out flat on the ground and flattens itself literally. It has a way of spreading its body, actually broadening itself as much as four times its normal width. And it sets up a hissing that will put a steam exhaust to shame.

Truly, to one not familiar with the creature, these tactics will create a considerable scare and give the snake a formidable appearance.

It is all bluff, however, and the backwoods man will, without hesitancy, kick the snake or step on it and pick it up in his hands—to the increased agitation and hissing of the reptile—certainly an act unthinkable with a moccasin.

It is the general opinion of the swamp country that a Spread-'n'adder has never, in all its existence, bitten anyone, or, if it has ever been *forced* to bite, the snake probably died of fright rather than its victim of poison.

IT was not so much that Jude was not tall, but that Tim Thurston was considerably taller. Thurston was lanky, but one felt that his muscles were made of some very tough fibrous substance.

He possessed a wiry strength that was quite equal to that of any man in the swamp. Jude wasn't afraid of Tim; but he was indifferent to him, keeping his loathing of Thurston to himself.

The usual Sunday afternoon service was in progress. Jude Craddock

was basing his sermon on the incident in the Bible where serpents came from the rocks and bit the sinners.

It was a remarkably good subject for the "parson," for it allowed local, if homely, illustration. Jude knew snakes and so did his congregation; there are plenty of snakes in the swamp country.

"Them snakes came crawlin' out—jest like moccasins from the swamp," the preacher said. He let his eyes roam over the small group gathered on the rough benches.

Jude gave each a warning look, waved his hand over the book lying on the pulpit, and then drew it across his lips.

The pulpit was a board nailed to the top of the tall stump of a pine sapling. He drew his breath and faced his congregation again.

"Jest like the Lord will send the moccasins from the swamp to destroy them sinners what persists against him. There's a warnin' t' the folks hereabouts in thet story in the Book. It's a prophesy. Them that is agin the Lord will be *bit* and die writhin' from the p'ison from snakes . . . "

Jude saw Tim Thurston with two companions approach the meeting. The "church" was entirely open air, having, in addition to the pulpit, only several rough benches made with axe hewn boards laid on short posts, which Craddock had himself built in a clearing.

Thurston held a jug in one hand and one of the other men with him possessed a stopperless flask. A quantity of the shinney contained in the two had, frankly and obviously, already been consumed by the party.

The preacher watched their coming with a furtive eye and repeated himself several times to allow Thurston and his friends to come within earshot of his words.

Several of the benches in the back were vacant. The newcomers stood by for a time, looking on, and finally they sat down on the rear bench.

Grins of sibilant raillery besmirched their faces as they listened to the preacher and they gave comment in scurrilous epigrams.

They passed the liquor generously to one another and even offered the flask to some of the other members of the congregation, who turned to stare at them.

If their presence broke the preacher's spell over his flock, Jude seemed not to mind. For he was directing his sermon at the three men—was deliberately preaching over the heads of the crowd to the back pew.

"The Lord ain't goin' to get no man what defiles His name, what does all manner of evil on the Sabbath—He ain't goin' t' fergit and let no sech person go unpunished. Any man what is filled with the meanness of the devil, what is too unclean to be seen in the presence of decent folks, what ain't fit fer nuthin' but makin' and drinkin' corn shinney and cuttin' up to annoy respectable folks, such low down, rotten sinners . . . them snakes 're goin' to come from the swamp and destroy them, like the Book says—all them what defied. . . ."

The preacher was perspiring and his eyes gleamed with his arduous effort, one hand with a finger extended waved in the air, pointing suggestively to possible sinners.

The congregation held its breath in anticipation, with a surreptitious ear cocked to the back pew.

Tim Thurston spat vociferously and flicked his tongue across the corner of his mouth, glancing at his companions as he did so. Then he stood up. It took him a few seconds to reach his full height. He was like some contrivance that folds up and has to be untangled when it is drawn out again. He looked over the heads of the congregation with

his brows raised in lanquid inquiry.

"I reckin yu was havin' some reference to me in them remarks yuh've just made, wasn't yu, parson?"

"I was meanin' them to which my words applies," Jude Craddock answered.

Expectancy of a thrill brought open smiles to the audience. Thurston scratched the stubble of beard on his lean cheek and nodded.

"Yeah," he said in a caustic drawl, "and I reckin them snakes yu been talkin' about must be *Spread-'n'adders*, ain't they? Don't do nuthin' but make a lot of noise . . . "

His companions appreciated the quip with loud guffaws. The congregation tittered more guardedly.

THE story of the incident spread. Those who were there lost no time in telling it. It was retold until it became a staple joke.

Not that the people of the swamp country took sides with either man. They merely appreciated good entertainment and were not averse to laughing over appropriate humor.

This may have rankled Jude. It very probably was a fact that he was "out-done," as the swamp folk express resentment and the irritation of disappointment, by Thurston's verbal triumph.

Anyway, Jude Craddock's sermon the following Sunday bore a profound similarity to the one which Tim and his companions had interrupted. Jude promised a sure visit of snakes upon certain persons, whose character and identity were pointedly suggested.

Craddock had reason to feel an enmity toward the lanky swampster. In the very life of the swamp there is an undertone of bitterness and hatred and struggle. Hatreds are there like the mud bogs. Their hold is relentless and everlasting and final. And they never vanish.

The previous generation had a hand in starting the faction. Jude's father and old man Thurston had gone to court in a law suit over a half acre strip of worthless ground. The case lingered on in the indifference of the courts for two years, and was finally dropped.

The contention of the two men continued in the meantime, acrimoniously. Even had there been a court decision it would have been of little more use than the opinion of an outsider who intervenes in the argument of two obstinate persons.

Eventually the actual controversy died down and the bit of land fell into the obscurity of marsh grass and gum trees. But it always could be brought up again in a moment's notice, when an excuse for an argument was needed.

Tim Thurston was that shiftless type of man who manages to capitalize his indolence and be well off. There were paths in the swamp that were known only to Tim and a few of his associates; somewhere along their winding, treacherous courses there were shinney stills.

And there was a time when two scrawny hogs belonging to Jude Craddock, "razor back" breed, being attracted by the smell of the corn mash, had summarily and without discretion explored one of Thurston's stills, and were murdered for their intrusion.

Craddock learned of this, for Tim made no disguise of his vexation at Jude's hogs feeding upon his mash. And Jude promised requital. He made stentorious threats, and for a time it looked as if the feud would flare out in virulent savageness.

Thurston carried a gun about with him, but perhaps he understood the

nature of this man who preached an acrid, self-conceived gospel better than most others. He met Jude's threats with open insolence, and derisive retorts.

The influence of his mother had been too great on Jude Craddock. His apathetic, simple mind could not awaken and rise, flaming from the mold into which it had been pressed. This ministry had given the man a vociferous, malignant tongue and the fear of an undefined quality. He never reached violence, and Tim Thurston spread his feet apart and spat on the ground before Gale Anderson's store, and made the remark:

"Hell, Jude Craddock's jes' like a spread-'n'adder—makes a lot of noise all over the place and ain't no more dangerous than a hop-toad. Why, he wouldn't bite—scare him to death if you tried to make him."

Thurston was contemptuous. The analogy was slyly repeated until it became a familiar term to the populace.

JUDE shook hands with those half dozen or so in his congregation, who came by the pulpit and dropped some stolid, but generously meant compliment of his sermon, spoke a brusque word of friendliness and then went on toward their homes.

He closed his Bible and stood for a moment leaning on the pulpit. As he looked up, he saw the girl standing at the edge of the clearing. She held back and seemed hesitant about leaving. She had lingered with a wavering intention of speaking to the preacher. Jude walked toward her.

"Howdy, Lou," he said.

Her downcast face was not lifted and her eyes remained fixed on the ground some distance away. She nodded briefly. Her hands hung uneasily at her side.

"Did yu want t' see me?" Jude asked.

Again the faint nod of her head. The movement caused Jude to notice her hair. It was uncombed, but not straggly and with the unkempt appearance of other's women's, like Mrs. Purdy, for instance. There was a slight lustre to it. It was one of the odd things one notices, unknowingly, at times.

The girl looked up and her eyes were upon his face. They were tired, spiritless eyes, somber; but there was something in them, some expression of anxiety or fearfulness. Her face became slightly redder than it ordinarily was. It was a torpid face with sagging lines and an unemotional dullness.

"Yes," she answered in a low tone. She caught the fingers of one of her hands in the palm of the other; she lowered her eyes and stared at them. "I—I wanted to ask you something."

"What is thet, Lou?"

"If—if—" she swallowed and lost her words in confusion. She began again. "I wanted to ask you, if—if it's true?"

"If what is?"

"What yu been sayin'—'bout the —'bout—*Him* punishing and doin'—doin' things to them—them what don't do right."

"Why, sure the Almighty'll do thet. Ain't it wrote down in the Bible thet He'll destroy His enemies with fire and brimstone, and thet even snakes will bite them what ain't doin' right.

"Sure He'll do thet," Jude Craddock repeated, and the muscles in his cheeks contracted a little and his eyes were lighted with a kind of fire.

The girl nodded. Somehow she was assured, but her mind had not been entirely satisfied. Her brows wrinkled in a perplexity of compre-

hension and suddenly her face assumed an agonized expression. Her eyes were wide and appealing when she looked at the man.

"What's the matter, Lou?" he demanded. She looked at him mutely for a moment, then:

"I'm afraid," she said.

"Afraid? Of what? What's scared yu?"

She made a gesture with her arm. "Of—of Tim Thurston," she whispered.

Craddock's eyes narrowed. He stooped slightly and peered more closely at her. "What's this, Lou? How come yuh're afraid of Tim Thurston?"

"I'm just scared of him."

"What's the matter?"

"I wondered if what yu said—if it was true, whether — whether——" she bit her lip and paused helplessly.

Jude caught her arm. "Tell me what're yu talkin' about," he said.

She desperately gathered her faculties. "He's been comin' at home. Paw's been buyin' shinney from Tim and he comes there nearly every night." The girl spoke hastily, nervously. "Mostly he's drunk and he brings Paw a lot of likker and gets him drunk, too . . . Tim's after me . . . "

It was only a short oath, under the man's breath. He seemed about to shake her. "Tim's been botherin' yu, Lou?"

Lou Farnell lived with her father and kept house for him. Her mother was dead and the other children in the family married.

"Paw likes Tim because Tim gives him shinney, and Paw says I've got to marry Tim. . . . Tim comes there all the time and he's nasty when he's drunk. . . . I'm afraid," the girl cried.

"There is them, Lou, what ain't got the fear of God," said Jude Craddock, and his teeth ground into the words. "Some day the vengeance o' the Almighty is goin' to visit them. I reckin thet'll have to be pretty soon, too."

"Tim said if I come here today to hear yu preach, he'd wait fer me down by the branch . . . "

"Yu let me walk home with yu, Lou. And if Tim bothers yu anytime, yu come to me."

CONTRARY to the circumstances in other communities, the social life in the swamp country is mostly masculine. Women "visit," and it is generally in order to borrow a cup of grits, or some flour, or something like that. But this is nothing to compare with the gathering of the men folk at Gale Anderson's store. In the winter they went inside and sat around the big-bellied, cast-iron stove. When the weather was warm and dry they sat on the benches that Gale had patronizingly placed in front of his establishment.

These benches were periodically repaired and replaced, for some of the contingents who gathered there were too lazy to hunt a new box lid when they needed it and absentmindedly whittled on the plank seats. And the blades of the swampster are pretty sharp.

Jake Green took a healthy bite from the tobacco twist and passed it back to Henry Quden. They were the most consistent members of the group and presided in honored places upon the benches.

"I hear thet 'Spread-'n'adder' Craddock's been preachin' right violent sermons agin yu, Tim," Quden said.

The man leaning against the side of the building shifted his sullen gaze to the speaker. His face was clouded morosely.

"*Him!* Thet mealy mouth — I

reckin he's jes' about lettin' his mouth git too loose."

A series of grins spread through the listeners. Jake picked a sliver of tobacco from between his teeth with his knife blade. "The old lady was tellin' me," he said, "thet the parson's been walkin' home with Sam Farnell's gal—Lou. She sez Lou waited fer Craddock after the church shindig last Sunday."

Thurston spat with viciousness. "He better keep away from Lou. Ef *I* cetch him at Farnell's when *I'm* there . . . " He shrugged heavily and turned away.

"Yu sorta stuck on th' gal yuhself, ain't yu, Tim?" Quden nudged his friend, Jake.

A glare. "Oh, yu go to the devil!"

Thurston had started to walk away. Then he paused and looked at the figure coming toward the store. Other eyes were upon the approaching man, too. He seemed to walk with considerable insecurity and a little difficulty. He stopped to swear volubly at an obstacle over which he had stumbled.

"Ben Sorlyen looks like he's been drinkin' up a couple of gallon o' yu shinney, Tim."

Thurston's back was to the speaker. He merely grunted indifferently.

Ben faced the tall swampster, swaying on his feet, his bloodshot eyes concentrating upon Tim's face with effort. Ben's fists were clenched, his lips parted in a drunken malicious snarl.

"Yu give me thet money yu owe me," he demanded unsteadily. "I want it now."

"I don't owe yu no money, Ben."

"Yes, yu do. Yu went and sold thet bag of shinney thet belonged to me. There wuz twenty-three bottles in it."

"I didn't touch any shinney o' yers."

"Yes, yu did. Yu didn't have no business doin' thet, and yu got to give me th' thirty dollars fer it."

"Git yuhself away from here, Ben!" Thurston's voice was sharp and irritable. "I don't owe yu nuthin'."

"Yu're a liar, Tim. Yu give me thet money or——"

"Don't yu call me no liar. Why, durn yu——"

Jake Green and another of the store-front group moved a few steps nearer.

"I'll git even with yu. I'll fix yu fer thet, Tim."

"Yu ain't goin' t' do nuthin'. Yer drunk, Ben. I ain't stole no shinney from yu," Thurston said.

"Ef yu don't give—I'll—I'll show them deputy sheriffs where yu stills is . . . "

Sorlyen sprawled on the ground. A less powerful blow would have toppled him over. Thurston stood over him for a time and Ben cursed him. Thurston's heavy, mud-stained boot struck squarely and with vicious force in the other's stomach. Ben's face became white and his body doubled up with convulsions.

THE monotony of passing days, which strife and bitterness and rancorous hatred cannot alter. Time in the swamp is immutable.

Jude Craddock went to the well and drew a bucket of water. He felt cautiously for the steps in the darkness. Murky clouds hid the sky and, as if that smothered all the world, all was stillness save for the stridulous appeal of frogs for rain.

As Jude's hand brushed across the post at the edge of the porch, a splinter came off and stuck in his palm. Inside, he went to the candle that burned on the table, and with the long, thick blade of his pocket knife dug the sliver from his flesh.

Jude was preparing supper. He

filled the coffee-pot and placed it on the front of the stove to boil. He stirred the cabbage that was being boiled with a piece of fat meat; the cabbage had scorched a little.

As he opened the stove door to put another stick of wood on the fire, he heard footsteps on the porch. He turned and moved toward the door.

Lou Farnell stepped into the candle-lighted room. She was out of breath and her flushed face gave evidence of hard running. Her hair was tumbled down and clung damply to her cheeks, and she had snagged the sleeve of her dress on something.

"What on earth's the matter, Lou?" Craddock asked.

Her eyes were telling him before she could control her panting sufficiently to speak.

"Tim Thurston's down at our house again tonight," she said. "He's drunk and awfully nasty. Him and Paw's been drinkin' shinney. I'm afraid, Jude. Tim said he wuz goin' to make me marry him, and Paw —he keeps sayin' thet Tim's a good man fer me.

"Paw's terribly drunk. I got scared and run. Tim came after me, but he staggered so I got away from him. . . ."

"Yeah." Craddock led the girl to a chair and she dropped wearily into it.

"I'm sorry, Lou——" He seemed about to say something more, but stopped. He gazed thoughtfully at the girl for a time. "Yu have some supper with me—reckin yu ain't et yet, have yu?"

She shook her head.

"Well, we'll eat. And then—we'll —we'll see. . . ."

The meal was consumed almost in silence. They sat across the bare pine table and ate the food, the candle making their features mask-like.

When they had finished the girl helped him wash the dishes and tidy up the kitchen.

Jude flung the wet dish towel on the string stretched across the corner back of the stove, and faced the girl. They stood there, uncertain, not knowing exactly how to face their problem.

"Yu—yu reckin yu can go back home tonight?" he asked finally.

"No. I'm afraid. Tim will probably stay there. He'd be waitin' fer me."

Her voice rang with her anguish and she took an impulsive step toward him. Her eyes were tearful.

"I can't, Jude. I can't!" she cried. "I'm scared of Tim. Ef I went back——"

"I know," he answered with awkward gentleness. "Yu hadn't ought to go back, especially with yer paw so drunk. I reckin I can take yu some place where yu can stay."

"Yeah."

There is something overwhelming in a helpless creature. Jude knew that the nervous, pitifully frightened woman had ceased to think for herself.

She was appealing to him for protection and comfort. The enormity of the situation rather bewildered him. His mind ached a bit with his intense thought.

"Lou——"

The pause was so long she thought he was not going on.

"Yes?"

"Yu—yu wouldn't want t' marry me, would yu?" he managed desperately. The sentence surprised him now that he heard it spoken. She looked away, flustered, and was silent.

"I git sorta lonesome here sometimes," the man went on, licking his dry lips. A breath of damp air blew in through the door and made the candle sputter.

"I reckin I could take care of yu, Lou. We been knowin' each other all our lives and—and I reckin I like yu pretty much. I been seein' yu at the meetin's and places——"

He brusquely placed his hands on her shoulders. She looked up at him for a moment.

"There ain't no right in yu bein' home and bein' scared and worried like thet. Do you think yu——"

"I reckin I wouldn't mind," she said slowly, her voice a whisper.

"Yu can stay here tonight, Lou. There's Maw's bed fer yu and I can make a pellet out here in the kitchen. We'll go over to Bay Minette tomorrow and git married proper."

The candle burned on slowly and the flame was eventually drowned in the melted wax at its base. The rain-flavored wind fanned the perturbed brow of the man who stood on the porch, or "dog-run," that ran between the two rooms of the house, and listened to the thirsty clamoring of the frogs in the swamp. . . .

JUDE CRADDOCK paid for his purchases and picked up the bundles of groceries. Gale Anderson counted the change and put it in the cash drawer under the counter.

"Tim Thurston was in here a while ago," Gale said. "Been drinkin' some, too, and wuz sayin' all kinds o' things."

"Yeah?"

"Yep. Tim has been sayin' a good many things since yu up and married Lou Farnell so sudden, parson. Some of them ain't been——"

Gale stopped and glanced at the other to see if he had gone too far. The face of Craddock was almost stoically indifferent.

"Tim's up in the air today," Anderson continued. "Been kinder making threats agin you. Reckin I wouldn't git in no arguments with him, Jude. Better keep out of his way. Tim's a nasty man when he's got shinney likker in his belly."

"I ain't afraid of Tim Thurston," Jude Craddock said. He started for the door.

The corners of the storekeeper's lips crinkled humorously. "I reckin yu're expectin' them snakes to come out of the swamp and git Tim," he said, unable to suppress a laugh.

Craddock did not answer. He went from the store.

Quden had just joined the group of loungers outside. He spoke to Jude.

"Well, parson, yu sure cught to go look after yu meetin' house in the clearin' if yu intend to hold church there Sunday."

Craddock looked at him dubiously.

"I just was past there and—there ain't much meetin' house left."

Suddenly Jude Craddock's voice was tense. "What yu mean, Quden?"

"Thurston's drunk. Lord, I ain't never seen no man so crazy drunk as Tim is. Acts like he's been pourin' shinney down his gullet fer a week."

"Tell me," Jude demanded savagely.

"Why, man alive, Tim's tore up thet place. Them benches yu built there, he's ripped up. Tim must o' thought he wuz seein' them snakes yu been sayin's goin' to' git him. He sure wuz poundin' up thet wood."

A lump came into Jude Craddick's throat; it choked him. He felt that he was reeling. He heard the other's comments on Quden's story, some of them tinged with a sly quip. But it all meant nothing to him.

He pulled nervously at the band of his shirt collar; the blood was rushing to his head. Abruptly he turned and hurried away. He was unable to speak. . . .

Jude was running, breathlessly, plunging through the forest. When he came to the clearing, he stopped, staring at the scene incredulously. . . .

The benches of the "church" had been torn up and the planks split into chips. The pulpit was destroyed. The clearing was filled with the scattered débris. . . .

Quden had been right. Jude Craddick was slightly dumbfounded. At first he could hardly comprehend. Then he was angry. As he walked home he became possessed of a virulent rage. . . .

THERE was no fire in the kitchen stove when Jude went into the kitchen. It was quite dark now; a candle flickered on the table. Just after he had entered and laid the groceries he had bought on the table, Lou came in with kindling for the fire.

"Yu're late gittin' supper," he said.

"Yeah, Jude, I'm sorry. I—I been busy—" As she turned to him the light from the candle fell on her face. Jude noticed that she was nervous and excited.

"What's thet scratch on yu cheek?" he asked.

She backed away a step. "Thet —thet ain't nuthin'. I jus'—a piece of wood flew up when I was chopping it and hit me in the face."

She had placed her hand to the cheek. Jude's eyes dilated and he went quickly to her. He caught her arm and she winced. There was a black bruise on her wrist and forearm.

"Tim Thurston's been here," he demanded, "ain't he?"

"No—o—" His fingers gripped her savagely.

"Yeah, Jude. I was drawin' water from the well and he came up behind me. He—he was drunk——"

The terror of that previous night had returned to her face. "He grabbed me, but I broke away and run. . . . Down in the swamp, and circled back. . . . I wasn't goin' to say nuthin' because I was afraid—yu'd——"

He was staring. Not at her, but at the wall back of her; there was an intense fire in his eyes. His face was drawn. The girl forgot her fear and was looking at him anxiously.

"What's the matter, Jude?"

"Let me alone," he cried. He did not know that what he had said was inappropriate. He did not care. He did not know that he had said it.

He strode from the room suddenly. The girl heard him cross the porch and go down the steps. She heard him there at the bottom of the steps and thought he stayed there.

She was afraid to disturb him, and went on preparing supper. In about an hour she called his name and he answered. He came in to the meal; there was a queer expression on his face. He evidently had been pacing about the yard. . . .

THE news reached Gale Anderson's general store first, of course. The two men, who, on a 'coon hunt, found the body of Tim Thurston, came there with their report and the call was sent to the deputy sheriff from there.

Early that morning the deputy, accompanied by Gale Anderson and Jake Green, and the two men who had found Tim, came to Jude Craddock's house. He seemed to be expecting them and went to meet them when he saw them coming across the field. The greeting was a little brusque, particularly on the part of Jude.

It was Gale who spoke. "Mornin', parson. Yu ain't seen nuthin' o' Ben Sorylen—either last night or this mornin'?"

Graddock shook his head. "Yu lookin' fer him?"

"Yep."

"How come?"

"Why, Tim Thurston was found murdered in the swamp back of yu place this mornin'. Sid Jemison and Lang, here, found him."

"I know."

"Ben killed him," Jake Green said.

Jude Craddock's protest was startling, quick and frantic. "No he didn't." The man nearly shouted the words.

"Oh, yeah he did, parson. Ben's knife was found alongside of him."

"Let me see thet knife."

The deputy held out the long, heavy bladed knife to Jude, who took it in his hands and examined it as though it was some strange curio.

"Thet's what he killed Tim with —thet and a light-'ood knot."

Jude's eyes were persistent, he held the knife in his hand for a moment, as if bewildered, before the deputy took it.

"Thet ain't Ben's knife. Ben Sorylen didn't kill Tim Thurston."

"See here," the deputy said, "what do you know about this?"

Gale Anderson answered for him. "Nuthin', Fred. Ben is Jude's wife's cousin, thet's all."

"Oh!" The deputy understood family ties.

"Yu ain't goin' to say yu seen Ben, of course," Green put in.

"I tell you Ben didn't kill Thurston," Jude repeated stubbornly.

"Sure he did. He was threatenin' to do it—him and Tim had a fight over some shinney and here's Ben's knife."

"Thet's my knife!"

All of the men glanced up at Jude, but their eyes were no longer interested, containing no more belief in the man's words now than before.

"Say, fer God's sake, parson, are yu crazy or a damn fool? Yu ain't goin' to try to get yuhself suspected to lie yer wife's cousin out of trouble. Why——"

"These here frog-stickers are pretty much alike," the deputy said, returning the heavy knife to his pocket again for safe keeping, "but this one's been identified by several as just like a knife that Sorylen tried to cut Thurston with once before. No, I reckin we got the dope on this fellow, and we'll get him."

"Sure. We'll be gittin' along. . . ."

Lou had come to the porch of the house and was looking at the men talking with her husband in the field.

Jude Craddock had caught the deputy's lapels and was babbling wildly: "I killed Tim Thurston. Ben never had nuthin' to do with it. Thet's my knife and—and I—did it—I tell you, I did!"

"Why, yu must be crazy——"

"I'm not——"

They were gone, eventually. They had laughed at Jude Craddock eventually, too. Guffawed at him. They could not believe the incredible.

There was evidence and this eccentric, probably crazy "preacher," who talked about snakes . . .

Him and his snakes . . . maybe he thought that the snakes had killed Tim Thurston, and he was to blame. Jake Green said as much. Even the deputy enjoyed the joke; he knew Jude Craddock's nickname.

They laughed and went away. Of course, they didn't take him seriously; it was too ludicrous.

THEY didn't believe him . . .

Jude Craddock walked slowly to the house. He entered the kitchen; Lou was there. He was glad that she was. An empty house would have been terrible. It would have mocked him, too, perhaps. But Lou

was there. She belonged there, for she was his wife.

She was speaking to him.

"Tim Thurston was killed in the swamp last night," she said.

It didn't matter what he answered. She was looking at him with concern. That didn't matter, either. He didn't want to have to say anything; he couldn't. He was mute. Words had left his mind completely. He was just glad to have Lou there. She was fixing breakfast for him. He wasn't hungry, but he thought it was nice of her.

Jude sat down at the table and fixed his eyes upon her, and just stared. It was as if he wanted to convince himself that her presence, at least, was real.

She had gone to the stove, lifted the coffee-pot, and turned. Then she paused.

"Who killed Tim, Jude?"

He was staring at her. And his eyes, the expression . . .

He was not saying anything, but his eyes, the way they were looking at her . . .

Understanding of what they were telling her came suddenly to her mind. She remembered and knew. She *knew!*

"Oh, Jude, yu didn't—yu *did not*——!"

She put the coffee-pot on the stove to keep from dropping it. Her body was weak, the strength was gone from it.

The room and everything whirled dizzily about her. Everything, except her husband's face, as he sat there at the table and looked at her. The girl sank into a chair, dazed and knowing. . .

Disliked and Unlucky

A cat's life is not a happy one in Japan, for though he is endured, he is not regarded with any friendly feeling. This is due not only to puss's connection with witchcraft and vampire proclivities registered in the superstition that he sucks the breath of sleeping babes, but also because with the serpent he was the only animal which did not weep when Buddha died.

The unluckiest beast in Japan is the pretty little fox, looked on as the enemy of mankind. The fox has supernatural hearing and sight and can read the thoughts of men. A wizard, always on the watch to delude men, the fox can at will assume the appearance of a beautiful woman, whose seductive embraces, like those of the "succubus" of the middle ages, lead to madness and death.

Statues that Walk

Everywhere in Japan one encounters carved animals, real or fantastic, some of which have protective powers against malignant forces. Those who walk abroad after nightfall should be careful, for then carved stone dragons, tortoises, deer, etc., descend from their pedestals and move stealthily through the dark, terrifying pedestrians. To lay these mysterious ghosts, the head of the image should be cut off.

The Enchanted Tower

DON RODERICK, last of the Gothic kings of Spain, while in his audience room in the palace of Toledo was visited by two venerable old men. They begged him to perform a duty which had been carried out by his predecessors, to affix yet another lock to the gate of the enchanted tower, repository of a terrible mystery on which depended the fate of the monarchy.

The king's curiosity was aroused and he determined to pierce the mystery, in spite of the terrible fate which had befallen all others who had tried.

With a gay cavalcade he rode out of Toledo and took the road to the mountains. They soon reached the tower, built upon a lofty rock and supported by four huge bronze lions. The door was secured by innumerable locks and bars, and in front of it stood its guardians, the two old men.

The king demanded that the door be opened, in spite of the pleas and prayers of the old men, who, seeing at last that he was inexorable, set about the task of unlocking the many obstacles.

When unlocked, the door would open to none but the king, who thereupon entered a huge hall. At the far end was a door guarded by a gigantic figure whirling a mace, which he dropped to his side as the royal train entered.

In a vast chamber, lit only by the jewels in the walls, was a table, and on the table a casket with an inscribed warning to proceed no further.

The rash monarch opened the casket and found a piece of linen painted with the figures of men on horseback, Christians and Moors, engaged in battle.

As he gazed on this linen, it seemed to enlarge. The figures

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moved as in life, while sounds of battle were plainly heard. His own horse ran across the field, riderless.

His curiosity only too well satisfied, the king rushed from the tower. At the door lay the guardians stricken dead as by a thunderbolt and the tower itself was in flames.

The warning came true. Spanish chivalry fell before the conquering Moors, and the king's body was never recovered.

That Banishes Sleep

The Japanese have an odd legend concerning the origin of tea. Dharma, a famous hermit, in great odor of sanctity in Japan and China, gave himself so to meditation that his limbs rotted without his noticing it, for he had remained seated on the hard ground fourteen years without moving.

He had forbidden himself sleep. One night, however, he fell asleep and did not waken till the sun was high. Indignant with himself for having yielded to such weakness, he cut off his eyelashes and threw them far from him, as miserable tempters, robbing him of the holiness to which he aspired.

Then a miracle happened. His eyelashes took root in the spot where they had fallen, and a bush shot forth, bearing leaves which the people of the country picked, and from which they made an aromatic infusion which chases away sleep.

The Bridge of Al Sirat

Before the Mahammedan paradise can be reached by those who have died in that faith, there is a bridge to be crossed. It connects Paradise and earth and makes a mighty span over the abyss of Hell. It is so narrow, that its breadth is less than the thread of a famished spider, or the keen edge of a razor or sword. The dead make this perilous crossing at a speed proportioned to their virtue. The most virtuous pass with the swiftness of lightning, others with the speed of a galloping horse, others at the gait of a walking horse, others limping, and the wicked, weighed down with their sins, at a crawl. These last on account of their slowness and their burdens in many cases slip and plunge into the murky gulf below.

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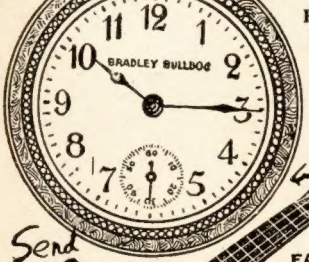

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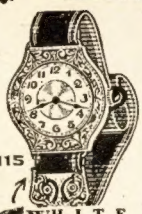
SIMPLE, virile, good looking. Miniature "Sam Brown" belt strap and buckle. Movement selected for accuracy. Case guaranteed to stand hard use.

ORDER L 91 SALE PRICE **$4.39**

Last Minute BARGAINS!

THE MINUTE MAN OF 1775

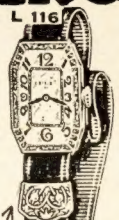
L 115



WHITE gold effect ladies' wrist watch. Ten and one-half ligne jewelled movement. Silvered dial. Jewelled sapphire crown. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.

ORDER L 115 **$4.98**

L 116

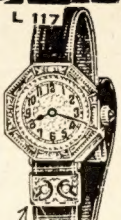


TINY RECTANGULAR WRIST WATCH

GOLD filled case. Six jewelled movement. Guaranteed accurate.

No. L 116 **$8.98**

L 117

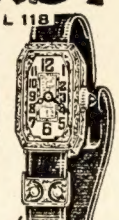


UNUSUAL WRIST WATCH

MAXINE, platinum effect case. Jewelled, accurate, elegant! Stores ask $15 for this style.

No. L 117 **$5.98**

L 118



SPLENDID TIMEKEEPER

6 JEWELS Sapphire blue stone stem. Dainty, refined, elegance.

No. L 118 **$7.49**

L 135

EGYPTIAN "LUCK RING"

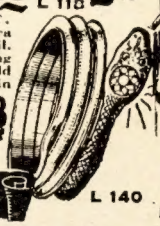
SYMBOLIC of luck in love. Old gold finish. Set ruby and emerald colored gems.

ORDER L 135 **$1.49**

MYSTIC Serpent. Famous charm replica against sickness and evil. Used by Hindus to bring Good Luck. 14-karat gold shell. Ruby colored gem in head.

ORDER L 140 SALE PRICE **$1.98**

L 140



L 90

Bargain

ARISTOCRATIC octagon shape, gold plated. Accurate jewelled movement. Clever expansion bracelet to match. Will slip over your hand and snugly fit your wrist. Imagine the surprise and delight of the lucky wearers. Will you be one of them?

ORDER L 90 **$3.98**

SEND NO MONEY Pay Sale Price & postage on arrival.

Don't Send a Penny

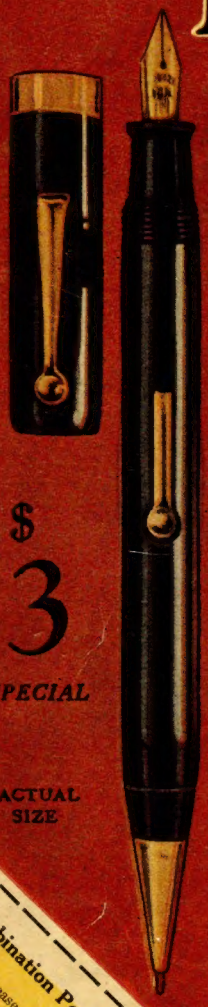
Bradley

Wholesale Jewelers

Newton Branch, BOSTON, MASS.

Send postal to Dept No. A-5

BARRETT
Pen-Pencil



$3 SPECIAL

ACTUAL SIZE

Why carry two when one will do?

RELIEVE your pockets of their usual pen and pencil burden—the Barrett Pen-Pencil is the ideal writing equipment— a big, easy-writing fountain pen and the perfect mechanical pencil in a ***single compact unit.***

The Barrett Pen-Pencil saves time and money for men and women in business, and for boys and girls in school. A beautiful gift at less than half the cost of a separate pen and pencil of equal quality.

Read the distinctive features of the Barrett Pen-Pencil described at the right and study the two full-size illustrations. We are proud of the Barrett Pen-Pencil, for it is a product of superior quality, as well as a most useful novelty. Tell your friends about it—now.

Remember—we stand squarely behind the value of every Barrett Pen-Pencil sold—***Your money back*** if you are willing to part with it after five days' trial.

Fill in the coupon — and mail it ***TODAY.***

Every BARRETT PEN-PENCIL has--

Combination fountain pen and mechanical pencil in unit form.

Barrel looks like polished ebony, with 14-K gold-filled mountings.

14-K solid gold pen point, with iridium tip.

Pencil action that propels, repels and expels.

Six extra leads in pencil.

Cap fits either end.

$4.50 JUMBO

ACTUAL SIZE

Barrett Special—Handsome, practical two-in-one pen and pencil, for both men and women. Women's model has ring in cap for ribbon instead of clip for pocket. Material and workmanship of guaranteed quality. $3.

Barrett Jumbo—For those who use a pen or pencil constantly. It has a large ink reservoir and a heavy-duty gold point. Light in weight and beautifully balanced. The last word in fountain pen and mechanical pencil perfection.

Dealers and Agents!
Write for special proposition

COMBINATION PEN-PENCIL CO.
Graybar Building, Suite 1457
420 Lexington Avenue, New York City

Combination Pen-Pencil Co., Suite 1457, 420 Lexington Ave., New York City

Please send me.....Barrett Pen-Pencils (lady's with ring on cap / man's with clip cap) (cross off one not wanted) Special $3.00 Jumbo $4.50 (cross off one not wanted) postage prepaid. If not satisfied I can return same and you will refund my money. I want a "fine" point (cross off one not wanted)—Otherwise "fine" point sent.

I enclose a check or money order for..... I will pay the postman $.....

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

State.....

M-6

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